GT
GAY PRESS EXCLUSIVE
Why John Grant is the voice of a generation
40 years of The Rocky Horror Picture Show
JAMES HASKELL
England rugby ace on homophobia in sport (as Keegan Hirst comes out)
Mark Bingham
Remembering 9/11's gay hero
John Waters
Talking about every film he's ever made
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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 30 SEPTEMBER

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Oh for a time machine! No, not to correct mistakes – that's a whole other heated debate. Although actually, who wouldn't be tempted with a few lottery numbers... But people often forget, in this fast-paced new world we live in, that us magazine people work a little further in advance of breaking news stories...

Which brings me neatly to Mr Keegan Hirst. We chatted with Keegan before his story was reported in The Mirror, just two days ago, as I write this. We obviously said that he'd be a great role model if he did decide to come out, but that we respected his right to make that decision himself, as and when he wanted to.

Of course, we'd already been in the studio with the brilliant – and BIG! – James Haskell almost a month prior to this, talking about just those kind of topics. So you could almost say that our wish came true... And maybe now with Keegan telling us, before his story was published, that he intends to keep playing, then he can be a role model of another sort, for a new generation. Maybe then we can stop talking about the 'last taboo' of gay sportsmen.

I was interviewed about Keegan – it's all getting slightly meta – about whether it was still an issue. Of course it is. I envy you if you truly live in a world where you think people with a public profile coming out doesn't help someone, somewhere. But let's not proclaim him a hero – let's let him get on with living his life without the pressure of having to live it as a lie.

And while it's a shame that, time machine permitting, we couldn't get Keegan on our cover this time, we're sure we'll be seeing a lot more of him in future. And, more importantly, the people he's inspired. ■ **Darren Scott** @darren_scott

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gt fifty

WORDS RYAN BUTCHER **IMAGES** MATT CROCKETT

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Actually, sod Romeo. It's all about Tybalt for us. Especially when he's being portrayed by an Adonis like Ryan Carlson from the Bad Boys of Dance. The troupe are touring the world with their reimagining of Romeo and Juliet. But Ryan had just enough time to whip off his top and star as this issue's GT Fitty... Enjoy

Ryan! You're playing Tybalt in an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet. How's that going for you? What attracted you to Tybalt? It's going great! I love the role of Tybalt, because he's such an extreme difference from who I actually am. I love playing a role that's in direct contrast to who I am in reality, because it's a constant challenge that pushes me to my limits.

When you're running around and dancing on stage every night, we imagine it must take a lot of stamina? Tybalt is extremely difficult, stamina wise. Especially with how dynamic and physical the choreography is. Adrienne Canterna did an amazing job showing all the amazing dynamics

of a character – especially a character that can all too often be portrayed as one dimensional. Adrienne choreographed the show to reveal all the different sides to every character.

Being on stage to massive audiences every night – confidence must be key?

What part of your body are you most confident about? I have confidence in every part of my body! I have a very strict workout routine, that I constantly keep up, to help me maintain a healthy body inside and out. I just hope people notice how hard I work...

Well it's pretty safe to say you have an amazing body. Do you like to show it off? If walking around shirtless was acceptable in any and every situation, I'd ALWAYS be shirtless. [Laughs] I even showed up for this photoshoot shirtless!

Important quick fire questions now – are you a boxers or a briefs man? I'm 100% a briefs man! Gotta keep it all together.

Who's your man crush? I honestly don't have one!

What's your favourite chat up line? I don't have any amazing pick up lines, but flying across the stage doing backflips has always worked pretty well for me.

Would you say you fall into the 'metrosexual' category? I'd say I'm your average straight guy. I guess I have some metro qualities. I care about my appearance, my ears are pierced, I have a tonne of tats and I put product in my hair. So if that's considered metro, I guess I'm kinda metro.

And finally, where do you want to be in ten years time? I'll hopefully have my own dance company by then. But even more importantly – I'll hopefully be in good enough shape to do another shoot for GT! ■

Romeo and Juliet is currently touring the world, for dates see badboysofdance.com, @badboysofdance, @rugburnn

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KEEGAN HIRST

"I couldn't even say 'I'm gay' in my head, let alone out loud." They're the words we all woke up to that morning on 16 August, when Batley Bulldog captain Keegan Hirst became the first professional rugby league player to come out as gay. The 6ft 4in rugby prop has received an outpouring of support ever since – even from the likes of Emma Watson and Sir Ian McKellen – showing his bravery hasn't gone unnoticed.

"I had a wife and kids," the 27-year-old added, "I've been a builder, a doorman, working in factories – I play rugby. I tick every macho box. How could I be gay?"

And the thoughts of his Batley Bulldogs team mates?

"The only time I felt free of the torment was when I stepped on the rugby pitch. Now I feel free."

With #KeeganHirst STILL trending on Twitter at the time of writing, it seems one man's struggle for acceptance is taking us one step closer to blowing the whistle on homophobia in sport. There's more on that and what Keegan's coming out could mean for the future in our big cover feature with rugby ace James Haskell, on page 48. But in the meantime, enjoy this shot from the Batley Bulldogs' charity calendar. We're sure this won't be the last we see of Keegan in GT...

@keeganhirst, @batleyrlfc, talking to The Sunday Mirror and Victoria Derbyshire for BBC Two. ■

The Bulldogs In The Pink Calendar is available now from batleybulldogs.co.uk and memorymill.co.uk. All profits benefit cancer charities

IMAGES KELIS BY DAVID LOFTUS / KEEGAN HIRST BY JOHN MILLER

I 'ate you so much, right now

Her milkshakes brought all the boys to the yard; and now her cooking will, too. Singer Kelis' new cookbook My Life on a Plate is ready to serve up a platter of recipes for differing cultures and dinner parties. From curry dinners to shrimp alcapurrias, the chart-topping singer's dinners will have you screaming at your friends: "DAMN RIGHT, it's better than yours!" ■

My Life on a Plate by Kelis, by Kyle Books, is out 4 Sept, £19.99

SPEED DATE

9-11 September
London Flower Show. With Syon Park as a stunning backdrop, get all green-fingered and at one with both Mother Nature and your family, in a day of tips that could very well make your garden bloom all year round... rhs.org.uk ■

September
Get ready to shake it out, shake it out as Florence and the Machine get their latest UK headline tour underway. With an evening full of her now-iconic tracks and looks, the dark days really are over. florence-andthemachine.net ■

12 September
Join Sir Terry Wogan and the BBC Concert Orchestra as they welcome open air performances from Russell Watson, The Jacksons and more for BBC Last Night of Proms. Goodbye summer sun! bbc.co.uk/proms ■

19-20 September
Munching strong after eight years, the Liverpool Food and Drink Festival celebrates the culinary delights of the city at Sefton Park. With local produce, drink and entertainment, you'll be in food heaven. liverpool-foodanddrinkfestival.co.uk ■

27 September
For one night only, take flight at West End Bares, as Café de Paris gets ready to #TakeOff. From hot guys to raising cash, let the boys of the West End and their strip-a-thon take you for a ride and raise money for charity, too. madtrust.org.uk ■

gethin anthony

WORDS SIMON BUTTON

Playing gay on Game of Thrones was a no-brainer for Gethin Anthony. "I was really excited about being part of a storyline that reflected homosexual affection and indeed love," says the actor who was Renly Baratheon for the first two seasons.

Renly, fourth in line for the throne and doomed to eventual death by a smoke monster, was all loved-up with Ser Loras Tyrell – played by our former cover star Finn Jones, no less. "And not only is it a gay storyline, but also they're genuinely affectionate in a world that's kind of starved of that," 31-year-old Gethin tells us, speaking about a past role in the present tense, as it still resonates with him.

"It was nice to portray a loving relationship and one that also felt like a full, adult relationship. It was wonderful to be a part of that and it's the reason Finn and I have had such a lovely experience with gay fans who've had nothing but lovely things to say about it."

What form does the fandom take? "It's from all angles really – from bumping into people in the street to Finn and I being sent these lovely t-shirts that someone had made, which had our faces in rainbow colours. There's been some lovely fan mail, including a wonderful letter from a gentleman in the US who told us he was about to propose to who I hope is now his husband."

Gethin, you will gather, says "lovely" a lot, which is fitting for this loveliest of thespians. But it's not a word he or anyone else would ever use about his latest on-screen incarnation. In Aquarius he's the charismatic, cool and calculating Charles Manson, America's most notorious criminal who – although it's never been proven he actually murdered anyone himself – inspired those around him to commit unspeakable acts.

He was also, by his own admission, a bisexual. And Aquarius depicts his relationships with both sexes. "Some of the storylines are heavily fictionalised," Gethin explains, "but they come from how, in his biographies, he's very open about having had experiences with men and, sometimes, with more than one person. Sexuality just wasn't a barrier for him."

Manson was a young offender who was always in and out of juvenile institutions. "It's well-documented that he grew up in prison situations and had encounters with men throughout his life," the actor who plays him so brilliantly continues. "He had more sexual encounters with women, but there was this freedom about that era – a 'free love' atmosphere with people feeling liberated from traditional ways of engaging with other people sexually."

Whereas his Renly Baratheon was all about love, Gethin's Charles Manson uses sex as a weapon. "It was how he got what he needed," he believes, wondering if the man who'll remain behind bars until the end of his life was capable of love. "That's where it becomes complex, because love is something that's in us all, it's a powerful energy, but in this darker context it's hard to see it in a conventional, romantic sense. It's hard to see an affectionate love in there, but 'free love' was part of the rhetoric."

Gethin was a model pupil compared to Manson. At school he was head boy and won a drama school scholarship, going on to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Old Vic, playing small parts in film and TV before Game of Thrones introduced him to a bigger audience.

He's also a tenor and, if you believe Wikipedia, is trained in African dance. Don't believe Wikipedia. He laughs. "Just to clarify on the African dance thing, OK so at secondary school I did a class with a genuine African dance guy – Bode Lawal, a fantastic man who shared Sakoba Dance with a few of us for a couple of weeks. How that made it onto my Wikipedia page and then onto my actual resume I have no idea."

His tenure on Thrones came to an end in 2012 and he headed back to the boards, doing four plays at the Hampstead Theatre that were set in the 60s and 70s. He thought he'd seen the back of flared trousers,

then Aquarius – which is set in the late 60s when the 'flower power' movement was in full swing – came along. "And of course, it's all flared trousers for the next however many years we're lucky enough to do the show."

Aquarius has been picked up for a second series, so Gethin can't ditch the flares any time soon. They're easier to slip into than the mindset of a man has horrible as Manson. "It's fair to say I had a few nightmares," the actor says of getting under the criminal's skin. But he's trying to nail the monster's motivations. "Any person can be judged by their actions and we know that monstrous things happen, but it's important as an actor never to diminish the complexity of a person's life. It's about what motivated him. What did he need to do? How did he do it? You don't start out going 'Oh, I'm going to play a monster today.'"

Manson flourished in the hippy era, when body hair was rife, which brings us to that famous manscaping episode of Thrones where Loras takes a blade to Renly's hairy chest. Did Gethin trust Finn with the razor? He laughs. "On the day, there was a barber from Belfast who came in to do the naked blade bit, because obviously it's very precise. I'm just grateful that he used a bloody good blade. He went round the nipples expertly and I'm still intact."

Graphic as it is, Thrones hasn't struck an equal balance on male and female nudity. "But I think that's something that goes right across the industry," the actor reckons. "If you stood back and did a tally, it'd be fairly imbalanced. Game of Thrones is just on par with everything else."

And would he ever do full-frontal himself? Another laugh. "Maybe I'm privileged in the sense that nobody is interested in seeing anything of me anyway." ■

Aquarius is on Sky Atlantic, Tuesdays, 9pm, @skyatlantic, @gethinanthony

Hello my precious loves! This month I'm writing to you with SO much excitement because, as you probably already know, or perhaps you don't, we're all systems GO for RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars 2! This couldn't have come at a better time with so many more amazingly talented queens released into the wild – the ONLY outcome for this one is superstar telly.

My favourite part of the All Stars situation is watching to see how they've grown since their respective seasons. Some have had ample time, some not as much, but all will be revealed once they hit that main stage. I'm doing my eyebrow exercises as we speak to make sure they're all worked out and ready to be lifted for the ultimate All Star side-eye. Who'll be joining Chad Michaels in the All Stars hall of fame? As I typed that, I worried for a second about a spoiler. You guys have me so well trained on Twitter! I can't wait to find out. You have NO idea how excited I am.

In other news, my bestie Leah Remini's show It's All Relative is now on its second series on TLC in the US. You may know and love her from the sitcom The King of Queens. You can watch it on TLC UK as well, but this series I got the chance to be on it. You get to see what it's truly like in our friendship and to see how ridiculous we are together. I know you guys were loving her when she made her celebrity guest judge debut on the Drag Race panel, so I know you'll be LIVING for her reality show. Let me know what you think when you see it! I know my UK babies will be first in line to the television!

I can't wait to be back with you all next month. So until then, you know what to do. Visit my website michellevisage.com and come see me on Twitter at @michellevisage.

XXX MV. ■

The top three T with Michelle V

01

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Dear Michelle

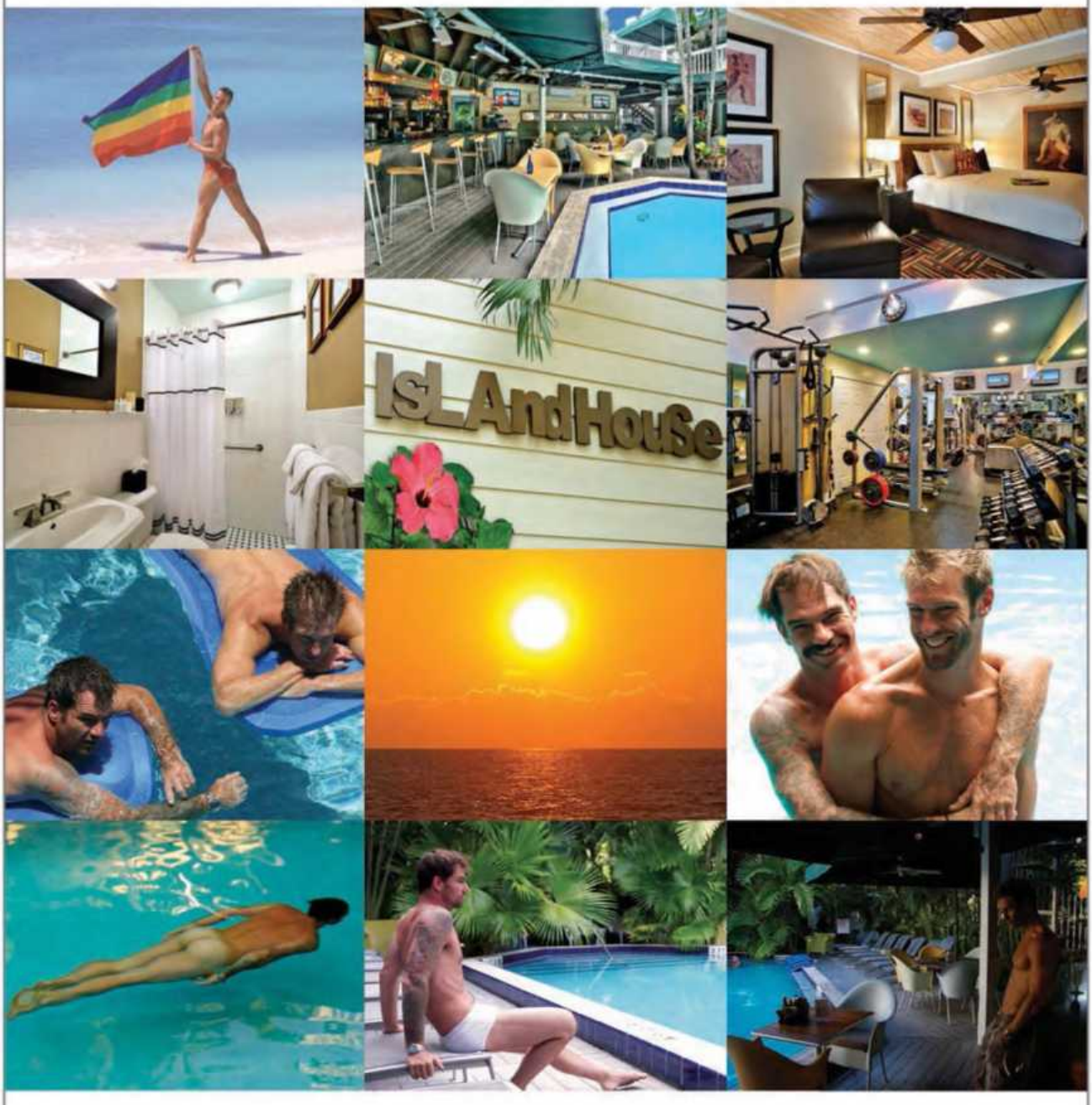
Where does your confidence come from as a person? As a woman?

From @jungyocalii

My confidence always came from the need to survive. When I got older, I realised that what I thought about me mattered WAY more than what anyone else thought. And I've lived that way ever since. You answer to YOU and no one else.

All Stars winner Chad Michaels with Ru and I at the premiere in LA

What will you remember?



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MICHAEL FEINSTEIN

With a big band show in London on the horizon, Michael Feinstein, the tireless champion of the Great American Songbook, talks Dame Edna, George Clooney and Judge Judy. Oh, and a bit about music, too

WORDS SIMON BUTTON

Ask Michael Feinstein why he's so enamoured with the Great American Songbook and the man who's done so much to keep the standards alive goes into raptures. "The writers had an eloquent way of expressing the human condition that still resonates today," he tells us. "It's my job, or my goal, to present these songs in a way that shows them off to their great advantage. And the music truly is timeless…"

The pianist and singer, who turns 59 this month, is talking about classics penned by the likes of American luminaries George Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter, but also such British songwriters as Noël Coward and Ivor Novello. "And while I do enjoy contemporary artists and contemporary music, especially contemporary theatre music, these writers had a certain craft that's largely lost," he insists.

Michael is on a very enthusiastic roll now, adding: "There's a certain kind of genius there. I don't know if it was in the water or in the air, but the level of brilliance these writers had has never been surpassed. I mean, Cole Porter wrote more than 1,000 songs, the Gershwins wrote 1,200… All these writers were very prolific, but the level of quality is just extraordinary. They were also much more sophisticated in what they said and a lot of the songs were very risqué."

Many of the writers were also gay or bisexual – which explains the witty lyrics, the poignancy and the heartbreak of songs that've lasted long after their composer's deaths. Michael's personal favourites include George and Ira Gershwin's Love Is Here To Stay and Johnny Green's Body and Soul, so it's a good bet they'll be on the bill when he brings his big band show to London on 27 September.

When we chat to him he's in New York, but is heading off to a music festival in Cleveland, then he's going to Indiana, then Los Angeles. "And I can't remember where after that," he laughs. He's also be prepping for the London show, which will feature a 17-piece big band culled from the UK talent pool, and which will be a combination of his beloved Great American Songbook, plus newer material. "It's one of my favourite kinds of shows to do," says Michael, who has also performed with symphony orchestras and smaller ensembles of just a few players. "To have a big swing band makes for a fun, energetic show."

Will there be any special guests? "We've been talking about that but we haven't come to any conclusions," he says. Then, very deadpan, adds: "I guess I'm the special guest."

Last time he was in the UK, a couple of years ago, he was joined on stage by Elaine Paige, whom he calls "a doll and a great artist for a reason", and Julian Ovenden. He went to see the latter in My Night With Reg, not knowing about the actor and singer's nude scene, and recalls: "Halfway through the performance Julian comes out au natural, which was completely shocking. Afterwards we went to dinner and when he asked me what I thought. I said, 'It was much more than I expected.' He thought that was the funniest thing."

Any chat with Michael inevitably leads to the dropping of names. "I've met just about everybody," he laughs. But he's not being boastful; it's just that ever since Ira Gershwin took the 21-year-old under his wing, tasking Michael with cataloguing his vast record collection, he's used to being around famous folk.

Ira introduced him to a lot of influential, fabulous people like next-door neighbour Rosemary Clooney. "She was like my second mum and she called me her sixth kid," he says of George's aunt. "And she had a great sense of humour." By way of example, he cites the time they were on stage doing Isn't It a Pity and, when Michael told her Barbra Streisand had recently covered it, Rosemary quipped: "Can I tell you how little I care?" Michael laughs. "I've never told that to Barbra," he says revealing that, yes, Streisand is one of his many celebrity friends.

He first clapped eyes on gorgeous George around 1980, when the fledgling actor moved to LA and stayed in the maid's room off Rosemary's kitchen, and wasn't that impressed. "He was very cocky and I thought, 'He's gonna be brought down a peg or two.'"

George's career, of course, eventually went stratospheric while Michael's has been very steady. He's done cabaret clubs and Carnegie Hall, scored a couple of musicals and covered the classics, and worked with big names – like Dame Edna aka Barry Humphries – and favourite collaborators – the

lovely Cheyenne Jackson.

Barry, whom he shared a bill with on Broadway in 2010, really impressed him. "He's perhaps the smartest person I've ever met and he knows more about anything than anyone. He has the largest collection of Oscar Wilde memorabilia and he knows more about art, literature and music than anyone I know. And he's as quick offstage as he is on it!"

And he rates Cheyenne, whom he teamed up with for a double act in 2009, as "an amazing singer who can sing anything". Just as he got an eyeful of Julian Ovenden in My Night With Reg, he'd seen Cheyenne modelling the most revealing of shorts in the Xanadu musical, but managed to keep his cool. "He's a very handsome guy but he's like a brother, you know? There are some people who're sexy, but you just don't see it. I mean, I still don't see George Clooney as sexy. I still see him as the unkempt guy who slept in the maid's room."

Michael is spoken for, anyway. In 2008 he married his partner Thomas Flannery in a ceremony presided over by none other than Judge Judy – another of his many fabulous friends – but not, he laughs, in costume. He was therefore very happy about this year's Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage, saying: "It was extraordinary because I never thought I'd see that happen in my lifetime."

But he has his concerns. "One of the sad things is the backlash – the negativity and hate that some people have expressed and the fact some states are still refusing to issue licences, saying that it violates the state rights and such, which of course is hogwash because federal law is the law." Michael sighs. "It's a reminder that we've made extraordinary strides but there's quite a way to go." ■

An Evening With Michael Feinstein and His Big Band is at the Adelphi Theatre, London, on 27 September. For more information and tickets visit reallyusefultheatres.co.uk

As forces prepare to collide, we get our first look at the upcoming new Star Wars: The Force Awakens film. This hotly-anticipated seventh instalment will feature an original story set 30 years after our last visit to this galaxy, far, faaaaar away, and promises to be truly explosive under the direction of JJ Abrams. Aaaaaaaaaaand breathe. 18 December, HURRY UP! ■

Star Wars is due for UK release on 18 December, @starwars

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From the dazzle of the West End to the bright lights of Broadway, they're the first ladies of theatre who've done it all. But, what's life like when you're fighting to stand centre stage and making a career from your hobby? We talk green skin, everlasting friendship and flying high with the wickedly talented Kerry Ellis and Louise Dearman

WORDS WILLIAM CONNOLLY **IMAGES** DARREN BELL

With choices on where to spend any extra cash getting more and more difficult with each passing payday, escaping to the magical world of theatre can be a win or lose situation. Pick the right show and your evening is set. Pick the wrong one, however, and you're left bored in your seat thinking about which ice cream to choose before the interval eventually comes.

Either way, as you crack open the wine and get comfy in your seat, backstage awaits a cast of budding actors ready to head to work. But is life always as glorious when synched and plastered to an almost unrecognisable degree? "It's like the best drug ever," explains esteemed actress and singer, Kerry Ellis.

The 30-something star, who tells us exactly where to go when talk turns to her age, has spent countless nights thrilling audiences in some of the most iconic pieces of theatre. But adjusting to life in the spotlight isn't always an easy transition.

"You have to understand this is a job and it's often hard. There's late nights, a lack of family connections and then the physical stamina needed to perform eight times a week. But it's like nothing else; you almost don't want it to ever stop."

Kerry, who recently returned to the smash-hit West End musical Wicked, is now somewhat of a stage veteran. But life wasn't always spent flying quite so high.

Before her training at Laine Theatre Arts, she took her craft to summer school in the hope of catching the eye of an agent or director. And there, right on cue, walked in her now close friend and ally, Louise Dearman. And it seems first impressions count for everything in the world of showbiz.

"I remember watching Kerry sing and thinking 'ALRIGHT! Belter. Who's that?'" chuckles Louise. "I knew I had to be as good as her and that's where our friendship began."

From Grease to Guys and Dolls. From My Fair Lady and back across to We Will Rock You; their CV's are an impressive mix of rock, pop and theatrical delights. But after three years of training together, and the occasional duet, they travelled a somewhat separate journey.

But one path they both walked was that famous yellow brick road to Oz and into the arms of a new musical about an unlikely friendship.

"I'd heard a buzz about this little show in New York called Wicked that people were paying hundreds of dollars for a ticket. I knew that, when the time came for a West End transfer, I'd love to be in it," Kerry tells us. "I first auditioned for both leading female witches before being offered Elphaba. And my green journey began."

But in a twister of fate, Kerry found her time in Wicked postponed, while Frozen favourite Idina Menzel reprised her high-belting role on this side of the pond. "It was disappointing. I'm still the first British girl to play the role, but it was tough to get given something and have it almost taken away. It was a hard time for me as an actress."

After a long stay in Oz and a casual few months keeping it green on Broadway, Kerry moved aside and in came a fresh faced replacement in her friend Louise. "Although I never got to be in the show with Kerry, I actually began my journey in Wicked as Glinda; before being invited back to play Elphaba," Louise tells us. "I was the first person at the time to ever get such an opportunity and I think this is still a record I hold."

As we continue to chat, phones begin to bleep and Twitter notifications come flying in, talk quickly turns to their fans. With some having camped outside theatres for more than 12 hours to see both in Wicked, their fans' "mind-blowing levels of kindness" have followed them even now beyond the Emerald City. Something they both hope remains. Yet, why so much devotion in the first place?

"Elphaba is green, she's so different and this gives fans the chance to understand a story but from a different angle," Louise starts. "They're able to feel different but not wrong. This show teaches that being true to yourself is the best way to be; regardless of the outcome," Kerry adds.

After one final flight; where next? "When you give back your broom and hat, you feel weird. So weird! Where on earth do you go after singing Defying Gravity every night?" asks Kerry. Agreeing, Louise tells us: "It's almost drug-like when you leave. And after, you look around and think, 'What on earth is next?'"

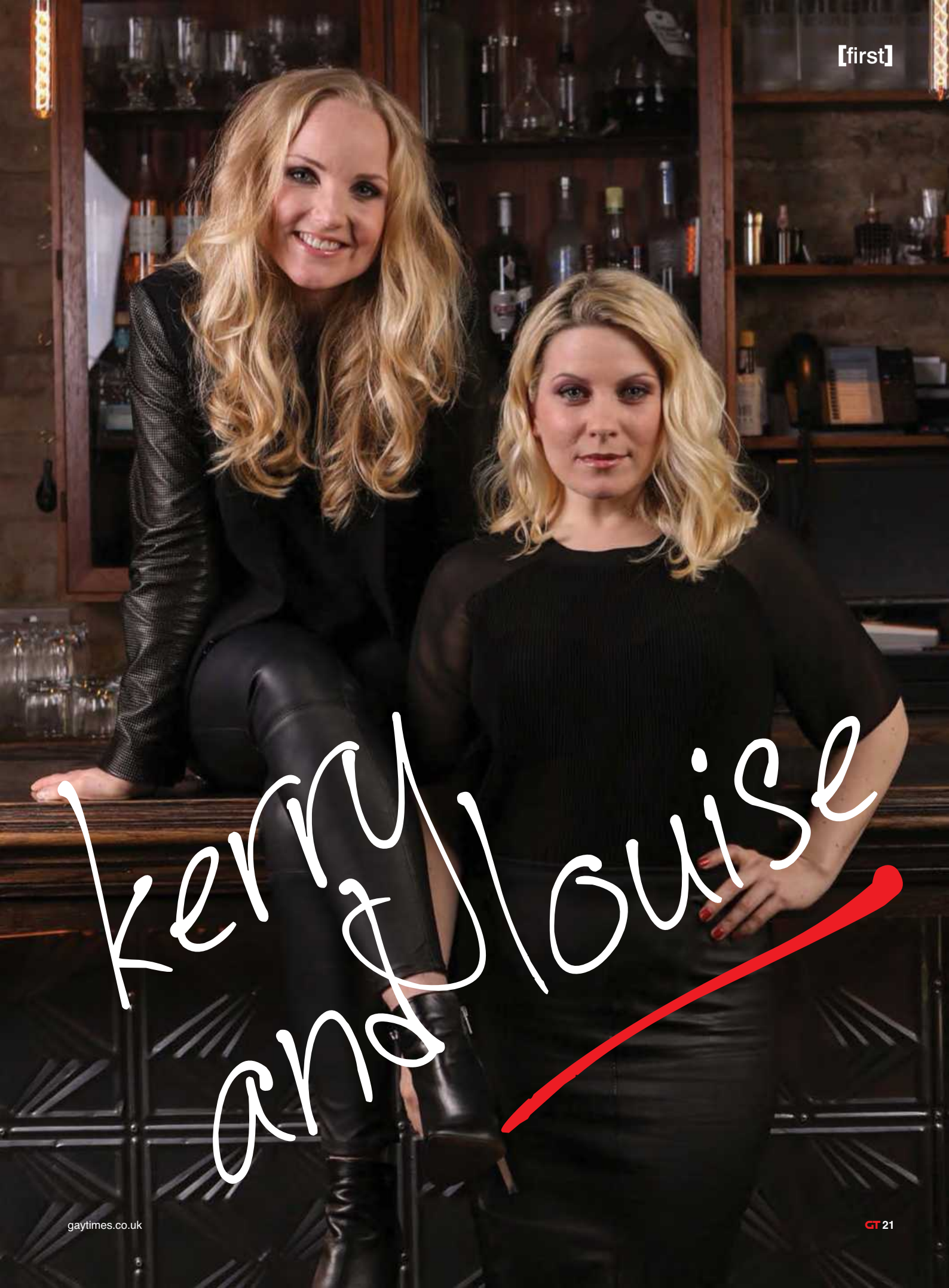
With both having now handed in their broomsticks for good, it may come as a surprise to many that this duo have yet to work together. Until now, that is.

"For us, our concert together is a celebration and thank you to our fans – but also to each other," Louise promises. "From iconic duets to unexpected mashups; the evening will be something for everyone to expect the unexpected from us both. We're saying NO MORE," laughs Kerry proudly.

As our chat comes to an end, the importance of this 15 year friendship shines through with the pride they both have for each other's great achievements. But sometimes, a little bit of self-confidence is exactly what's needed. And Louise isn't afraid to put this to the test: "I'm so bloody proud of what we've achieved, y'know Ellis? And I'm anything but embarrassed to shout, scream and tell the world, 'WE MADE IT GIRL!'"

Curtain up: it's showtime. ■

Kerry and Louise: Live in Concert is at the Prince Edward Theatre, London, on 27 September, delfontmackintosh.co.uk
@kerryellis1, @louisedearman, @kerryandlouise.



kerry and louise

IMAGE ANGUS MALCOLM

OAR-SOME DELIVERY

Those Warwick Rowers boys do spoil us, don't they? We've been able to wake up with a different one each month thanks to their calendar. And good news – they're extending the same pleasure to us next year, too. And all in the name of tackling homophobia in sport. Oh, and if that's not enough, keep your eyes peeled for an upcoming coffee table book, made up of 200 pages of muscle and a splash of full frontal nudity for good measure. In the mean time, enjoy this exclusive teaser image on us. We reckon it'll be worth a stroke or two... ■

Calendar packages start from £12.99, @naked_rowers, warwickrowers.org/crowdfunder

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As the BBC prepares to air Boy Meets Girl, the UK's first sitcom to features a trans woman in the main role, we talk open minds and facing the British public with the show's leading actress, Rebecca Root

On the BBC championing a lead trans actress...

In my mind, the BBC is truly being a national broadcaster, as it's truly reflecting British society. And that's what it should do. It's fantastic!

On open mindedness to trans issues...

I'm in my 40s and when you think back to the 70s and 80s, there was just nothing. It's just another example of how our society and our world is evolving. People are much more open to the situation.

On using comedy to explain life as a trans woman...

Leo asks Judy what it was like before transitioning? Then she says, "It was like being in prison, and never having a release date." When you transition, that's what it's like; coming out of prison. Out of the tunnel.

On the support of her family...

My family has never been anything other than warm, nurturing, loving and incredibly supportive. I know that's not everybody's experience and some people have despicable families, relatives and friends who hate them and reject them.

On inputting her own experiences into the show...

The production team were only ever open to anything because they wanted to respect the trans community. I suggested things, and writer Elliott Kerrigan said he can work that in. He said that when he was writing Judy, he heard my voice. I'm not saying he wrote Judy for me, but I was the top of his mind. That's why you get a sense of it being a perfect fit.

On facing the British public...

I don't want to waste energy on whether or not people think I'm acting OK. What I'm nervous about is that I want people to WANT to watch it, be open to the story and to be engaged. I just want people to be entertained and charmed and to enjoy meeting these characters.

Boy Meets Girl airs in September on BBC2

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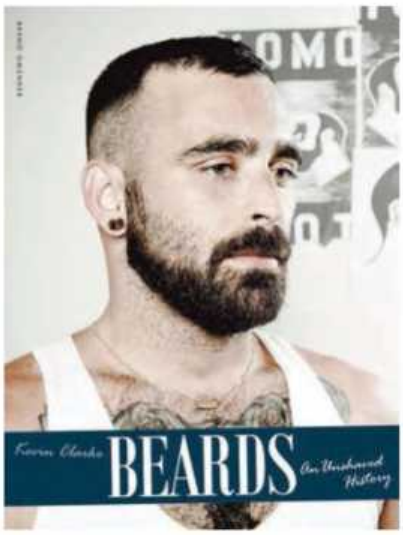
RAZOR SHARP

Look cool and stay sharp with author Dr Kevin Clarke and his new book Beards: An Unshaved History. Kevin walks you through the hairy history of the beloved beard, and even talks the identities us gays have adopted throughout our years stood in front of the mirror. With a clean shave nowhere to be seen, explore the golden age of promiscuity and find out exactly how erotic a beard can be. Stubble rash has never been so cool. ■

Available via Amazon and bookdepository.com from 1 October, £29.99



In our wildest dreams... What's special about this latest collection from Belinda Carilse, you might ask. The fact that it's one of those massive boxes containing 26 special CDs designed to look like the original singles, bursting with remixes and rare tracks? Well, yes. But also the fact that a long-lost Belinda classic, In My Wildest Dreams, has been found and included. It's the theme to Mannequin, and we *know* you lot are fans. Available at myplaydirect.com/belinda-carlisle. But wait! We've got signed copies to give away! Check out our NEW website, gaytimes.co.uk for details. ■

IMAGES BLAKE LITTLE / BRUNO GMUNDER / JP SANTAMARIA

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Sweetie, Darling?

From topless miming to Katy Perry on Russell T Davies' magnificent Cucumber, to hosting his very own Radio 1 show to millions every Sunday afternoon, Cel Spellman is a man without fear. That's why we just had to give this 20-year-old Barnsley boy his most gruelling challenge yet – our sweetie jar of random questions

WORDS WILLIAM CONNOLLY **IMAGE** JAMES BURTON

What underwear are you wearing today? White Calvin Klein's today. Trunk fitted, as it's a little longer in the leg. It keeps it all tucked up and secure. I think I look good in them, too. If you're looking like you're packing, you're laughing! [Laughs]

Have you ever had sex outside? No!

Have you ever stolen anything? Yes. I took a necklace from a museum shop, but I was so worried I admitted it to my parents. Oh, and pick 'n' mix, but I'm a 90s kid so it kinda came with the territory, I think.

Best bit of advice you've ever received? Take rejection. I remember being a kid and, when I said I wanted to be an actor, being told that there's lots of rejection when you audition – and in life! It's tough, but if you can't take rejection, this isn't the business for you.

What's your favourite song to sing in the shower? I'm a big fan of that Jason Mraz song, I'm Yours.

What's the most embarrassing moment of your career so far? Ahhhh! [Laughs] I've sadly got an answer for this one. I was about nine or ten and I was in a production of Oliver! But, because in the show I crawled underneath the stage, I wore these big Scooby Doo slippers. In my opening scene, I came out of a trapdoor, waked behind the two actors who were leading that moment, and then could hear the audience laughing and realised I'd forgotten to take off my slippers. I was mortified as a kid.

What word best describes you? Funny. I'd take funny. Yeah, funny. Or maybe a little annoying.

Favourite swear word? Oh, erm… PRICK! [Laughs] Yes, that. I say it under my breath all the time and it makes me feel good.

Who's your biggest man crush? Johnny Depp. He just doesn't give a fuck and with that, his jewellery and acting and everything. Cheek bones, tan. I could go on.

Are you vain? It pains me to admit it, but, yes. [Laughs] I remember being sent some publicity photos recently and thinking about ways I could look better. So yes, it kills me, but yes. I almost asked if they could be touched up a bit.

Kylie, Madonna or Gaga? Madonna.

Would you rather not eat or not speak for 24 hours? I DON'T KNOW! OK, OK, OK, not speak.

What's the last thing you read about yourself on the internet? [Laughs] I read a fanfiction that a friend sent me a link for, which bizarrely included me. It had me doing sexual stuff I'd never do. Weirded me out!

Longest you've ever been without showering? At the most, two days.

Last person to see you naked? My dog, who decided to come upstairs while I was in the shower.

Are you good at flirting? I'm getting better, very slowly.

What's the rudest word that you know? I guess people would expect me to say the 'c' word, but that goes right through me. Actually, thinking about it, some of the things Russell T Davies had me saying in Cucumber might be a bit worse.

Is there a film you can quote every line from? The Hangover. Easy. Hands down.

What's the first thing you do when you wake up? Check my phone, like everyone, I think. I go Sky Sports app, Twitter, Instagram – and then finally get up! [Laughs] I don't wanna be like that, though. I should've said I read a chapter of a book and drink a fresh glass of water, but I don't.

Who's your style icon? Keith Richards. He just oozes coolness.

Most famous person you've ever met? Harrison Ford. Will Smith. Katy Perry. I could've married Katy there and then. I love her!

If you could go back and give your younger self any piece of advice, what would it be? Be a bit more confident asking people out. When I was 15, my mates were always so big and confident, and I just wasn't. Maybe even start training a bit and stop eating quite so much.

What's your biggest fear? SPIDERS. It's not a phobia, but I have a strong dislike. If I can avoid them, trust me, I will.

Who do you think has the perfect face? Erm… Kendall Jenner, at the moment, I think. Well, her or Johnny Depp.

Worst date you've ever been on? Give us all the gossip… Once I forgot my wallet, but I realised right at the start and had to sit there the whole time knowing I couldn't pay. Then, at the end, had to do the old forgotten wallet trick. Yeah, didn't go down well. We didn't go on a second date, surprisingly.

What's your guilty pleasure? Cookie dough ice cream or any TV series. TOTALLY HOOKED!

The X Factor or The Voice? The X Factor, but only because I've never seen The Voice. I wanna and I'll find time to catch the new series when it's out.

How many hours sleep do you need a night? I would LOVE to get eight, but I can survive on four if needed.

Most expensive thing you've ever bought? My Macbook Pro or my car insurance.

Strangest thing you've ever put in your mouth? A witchetty grub. It was quite thick and had a lot of meat to it. VILE.

Favourite accent? Irish or American.

When did you last get a naked selfie? Never! [Laughs]

But have you sent one? Nope – I'm too smart for that one! ■

The first full series of Russell T Davies' Cucumber is available on DVD now via channel4.com/cucumber. Catch Cel on BBC Radio 1 from 4pm Sundays, @bbcr1, @celspellman, bbc.co.uk/radio1

IT'S NO SECRET THAT GAY PEOPLE ARE FLEEING FROM THE 78 COUNTRIES THAT'VE OUTLAWED HOMOSEXUALITY. BUT ON REACHING THE UK, LGBT ASYLUM SEEKERS FACE DISCRIMINATION, DETAINMENT AND VIOLENCE. IS IT TIME THE LAW CHANGED?

WORDS THOMAS LING **IMAGE** OLI SCARFF

IF YOU LIST FRIENDS OF THE GAY community for this year, The Daily Mail probably won't be high up. After dismissing plans for classes addressing homophobic bullying as "sex lessons" a few months ago, the paper has recently zeroed in on a new target – people forced to flee governments that could stone them to death because of their sexuality.

One story in particular stands out. The Mail recently claimed signs were plastered over the Calais migrant 'Jungle' encouraging people to fake being gay for an easy way into the UK, suggesting those previously escaping persecution by one of the 78 countries that outlaw homosexual acts are, in fact, liars.

The problems with this come thick and fast. When asked why a story was published without a photo of the posters, The Mail claimed it never took a copy because "it doesn't make for a very interesting picture", adding that if we checked now, there's a chance the signs might've already been taken down.

But what happens if you ask Vice reporter Sally Hayden, who saw the exact location of The Mail's apparent sightings at the time the story was published? "No, I didn't see any posters like that." And what about Dr Thom Davies, whose research involved spending recent months inside the camp? "No, I've never seen them." It seems there's simply no evidence of the posters The Mail is claiming were there.

Overall, the story is yet another distraction from the bigger problem – the terrible reality facing LGBT asylum seekers. Just for starters, there's the many people refused refugee protection in the UK due to the inherently flawed decisions based on Home Office policy. "It's unfair, pure and simple," says Paul Dillane, executive director of the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.

"One in five LGBT asylum cases involved stereotyped questions in a situation where it's often a matter of life and death. We've had cases where people have been asked where they go clubbing in order to determine their sexuality. They assume that the first thing LGBT migrants – people living on £5 a day – would do when arriving to the UK is go to a gay club."

It's this failure to understand the complexities of LGBT life that can rip apart people's lives. Aderonke Apata, a lesbian from Nigeria, was refused asylum when interviewing officers unearthed some past heterosexual relationships. This decision was upheld, even though she showed the Home Office a DVD and photographs of her sex life with her current female partner.

The absurdity of Aderonke's story doesn't even touch the most gruelling aspect of many LGBT asylum seekers' everyday life – the UK's Detained Fast Track system. It's a process allowing the Home Office to lock up innocent people into centres offering little privacy, lengthy integrations and open homophobia – both from other inmates and guards.

"On one occasion I was threatened by a cell mate," says Kato, a gay asylum seeker from Uganda. "After calling me all manner of derogatory names, he said, 'I will rape you, fuck you to death and make sure I kill you if they ever allow you to stay a night in my cell.' It all happened in front

LEFT FRENCH POLICE IN THE CALAIS MIGRANT CAMP KNOWN AS THE JUNGLE

of a prison official."

Kato is not alone. Akiiki, another Ugandan refugee, faced the same reality in the centres: "One of the guards called me a poof and there were Jamaicans who kept hurling abuse at some Iranian guys – calling them batty men." Another, Tahir, a gay man from Pakistan eventually granted refugee status, was sexually assaulted during his detainment.

This is precisely the environment in which gay people are expected to gather evidence that may prove their sexuality, or phone a lawyer about their case in front of other inmates. Worse still, they have only two weeks to put together their case – 14 days to come up with a lifetime's worth of proof in a place where the threat of violence is not only real, but rife.

It's little wonder that John Vine, the chief inspector of Borders and Immigration, expressed concerns in a report last year about the quality of decision making, when more than a quarter of initial LGBT asylum decisions were overturned at appeal. In other words, it's a system seemingly set up to fail.

Although there's no official statistics, the pass rate in the Home Office is well known. "We knew that for about every ten LGBT asylum seekers, only one would get through," says Gareth Gross, who from 2001 spent ten years as an immigration officer. "A few times I've had unsuccessful asylum seekers contacting me just to say I was wrong. All I could do was sincerely apologise."

Fortunately, the unfairness of the process has been acknowledged by the government and, in July this year, the centres were "temporarily suspended" by the Minister for Immigration, James Brokenshire. But it might not be long before LGBT people escaping punishment in their own country may again face being locked away guilty before proven innocent.

"I'd be very surprised if the Home Office didn't revisit the Detained Fast Track system," says S Chelvan, one of the country's leading asylum lawyers. "They very much consider this the most effective way of dealing with cases they deem to be simple."

Although it may only be a matter of months before the centres come back, we shouldn't ignore the progress made. Before it was ruled unlawful in 2010, gay asylum seekers could be sent back to their country of origin if it was thought it was tolerable to hide their sexuality.

And thanks to Chelvan, gay asylum seekers will never have to prove their sexuality using their knowledge of the Village People, after the Home Office adopted his interview guidelines based on stigma from their societies, rather than crude stereotypes.

However, real equality is still a long way off for gay asylum seekers. If the LGBT community turns its back on this issue, then thousands will have to return to countries like Uganda, whose homosexuality death penalty was born out of the remnants of British colonial rule.

We must remember that the rainbow flag has a place in every country, no matter how much The Daily Mail has a problem with it. ■

Some names of asylum seekers in this article have been changed to protect their identities

THE STONEWALL MOVIE – ENTERTAINMENT OR AN OPPORTUNITY WASTED?

When the trailer dropped for Roland Emmerich's retelling of the Stonewall riots, it was met with huge backlash for downplaying the roles of trans and black activists. But is it right to judge the movie already?

Entertainment Craig Young
Craig is a gay actor, currently starring in TNT and Sky One's The Last Ship. He tweets at @craigryoung.

We seem to be up in arms over the "whitewashing" and cisgender casting of the characters in the new Stonewall movie, This, by the way, is based solely upon the trailer.

Firstly, in reading the description for the movie, it says a "fictional tale." What part of fictional do these people complaining not understand? Even the 1995 Nigel Finch movie of the same name is declared a work of fiction. Although he did choose to include real life interviews with some of the people who where actually there.

These must've been painful times for these people, with the police brutality they endured, and I thank them for being our forefathers and mothers who stood up for what was right. But this is Hollywood, where casting decisions are based upon how many Twitter followers a star has, and actual talent accounts for only 9% of the reason someone may get the job. The very attractive Jeremy Irvine, hot off War Horse, is perfect to play a young white man kicked out of his home, only to band with a bunch of misfits in New York City to witness one of the most life turning nights in LGBT+ history.

Why did the screenwriter choose to write his story this way? Because he did. It's his story, not yours. Instead of complaining about a two minute trailer for a film you haven't yet seen in its entirety, you might want to go out, make your own version and see how well it does. The director Roland Emmerich has made some pretty amazing entertaining movies in his career; and as a gay man himself, was probably well aware of wanting to make a historically correct film. But at the same, he probably wanted to see a return on his investment – and entertain the masses.

In some of the best autobiographical films, they can't show everything, and purposefully leave parts of the story out. Milk, Lincoln and The Iron Lady – to name but a few. At the end of the day, if you want to know what really happened, you either had to be there to witness it first hand, or pick up a book. Just don't trust the movies, because after all, their job is only to entertain. ■

An opportunity wasted Ruth Hunt
Ruth is the chief executive of UK LGBT charity Stonewall. She tweets at @ruth_hunt.

The Stonewall riots are often referred to as the birth of the LGBT liberation. And that birth was led by activists. Activists who were trans women of colour (TWOC), drag queens, gay men, bisexual people and lesbians, supported by allies.

Although a full cut of the film based on the Stonewall riots has not been made available, its trailer and initial marketing campaign has caused confusion and anger.

What concerns me, and many others, is that, from viewing the trailer alone, the integrity of the Stonewall riots doesn't seem to have been preserved. Yes, movies are often fiction based on fact, but it seems that the true heroes of the event have been lost. Marsha P Johnson is a TWOC who was involved in the riots. She allegedly threw the first brick and is revered as one of the most important freedom fighters for our movement. But the movie trailer proudly shows a white cis male – the protagonist Danny – taking this role.

Johnson does make the movie, but not the trailer or the poster. And many of the other important women who were part of the riots – including Silvia Rivera and Stormé DeLarverie – apparently don't make the cut at all; erased from their own history, side-lined and undermined by the work that goes into preserving it. These trailblazers deserve our attention.

There's a sense of irony, which has evoked anger among many – myself included – that a film intended to pay homage to the 'unsung heroes of the riots' has instead actively replaced them.

This could've been a golden opportunity for Hollywood to celebrate the diversity of LGBT people worldwide, to give a platform to trans actors of colour and other diverse LGBT actors, to give visibility to marginalised groups and empower the legacy of the LGBT giants. It seems to be an opportunity wasted.

We hope that director Ronald Emmerich's trailer doesn't reflect the film in full, and the film – like the movement itself – inspires all of us concerned with LGBT equality to play an active role in our future. ■

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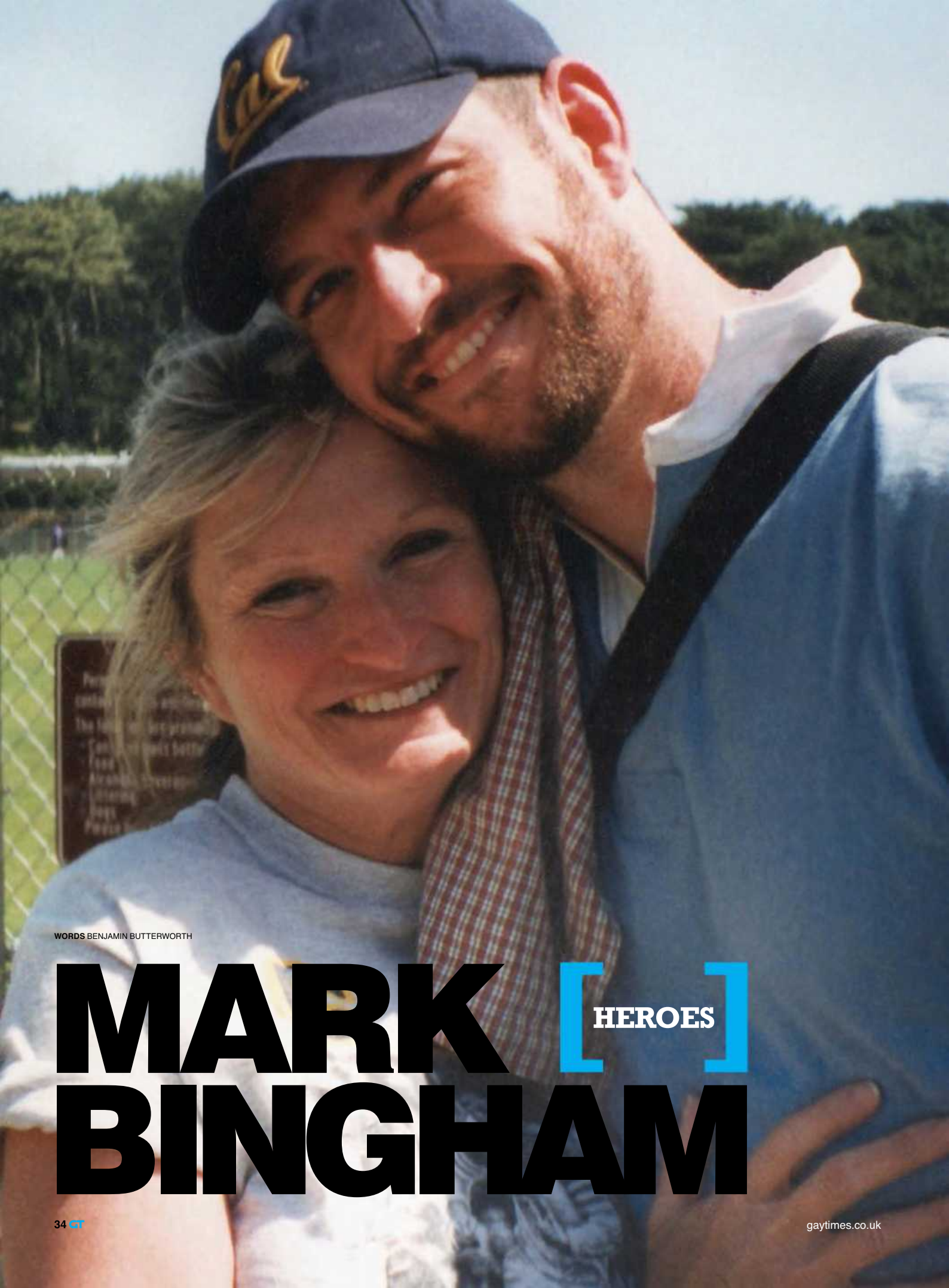

WORDS BENJAMIN BUTTERWORTH

MARK BINGHAM

[HEROES]

Mark Bingham was a talented rugby player from America's south. On 9/11 he wrestled terrorists aboard Flight 93 – stopping it from hitting the White House, but sacrificing himself in the process. The bravery made Mark an American hero. Then America learned he was gay

OUR 'HEROES' FEATURE USUALLY recognises gay people who're extraordinary in life. But Mark Bingham was extraordinary in losing his life.

It was the morning of 11 September, 2001, that terrorists captured United Airlines Flight 93. Their aim was to blow up either the White House or Capitol Hill in a planned attack. Mark Bingham and other desperate, determined passengers found themselves in the fight of their lives – attempting to wrestle control from a team of barbarians bidding to kill them all.

Exactly what happened in the minutes aboard that flight is unclear. Recordings from the cockpit recall how Mark and others were just moments from regaining control as a violent tussle took place.

At 9.44am, Mark took the airplane phone to ring his family. Now, 14 years on, his mum, Alice, reveals the recording of that final call.

"Mom, this is Mark. I just want to tell you I love you, I'm on a flight from Newark to San Francisco and there are three guys who've taken over the plane and say they have a bomb," Alice recalls, her voice breaking as she retells each detail.

"Then there was a silence and a muffling and I could hear other people speaking. I said, 'Who're these people Mark?' Then we were disconnected.

"That was the last time I heard his voice."

Mark had been sat in row 25 of the morning flight. Twenty-eight minutes on from the call, the plane nose-dived into a field, fragmenting violently on impact and killing every person on board. Mark was 31 years old.

Left in the ground was a gaping hole from the sheer impact of the high speed crash. The plane was never recovered – it had been split into too many pieces. As had the bodies of those onboard; their coffins containing suspected parts of each person.

"'I want to be totally used up when I die,'" Alice recalls of philosopher George Bernard Shaw, "and that was totally true with Mark. I didn't ask what they found of him. I never opened the casket because it's more about having a way to remember him than what's really there. And he's always remembered."

Almost exactly ten years earlier, on 27 August, 1991, Mark had taken his mum for dinner at his university campus.

"I remember it vividly. He sat me down and was telling me all these things about his new life. Then in among a whole load of words was 'I'm gay'. I was quite shocked. We parted minutes later and Mark thought I'd need time to take it in, and I did, he was right.

"I had to go on my own journey. I didn't accept the news particularly well. I've had to do a lot of growing myself to realise it was very touching that he felt he could share that information with me and trusted me with it.

"And now I've ended up a proponent of these issues and campaigning for the rights of people like Mark. I'm so delighted to see how the world has evolved and been on the same journey I have. For too long, America reviled gay people. And now, finally, we're somewhere where people treat others equally and everyone has the right to marry. I just wish Mark could be here with me to enjoy it."

Mark hadn't been in love when he died, but was, as his mother puts it, "a serial bachelor". He'd been driven to the airport on 9/11 by the lover of his final weeks after a long weekend's partying with friends. They'd had to race to make the flight; waking up late the consequence of a prolonged hangover.

Many of Mark's friends shared his passion for rugby. Friends who went on to establish the Bingham Cup, an annual tournament for gay and bisexual rugby players around the world named in his honour. The Gotham Knights club, in San Francisco, permanently bears the colours Mark wore for his university team in memory.

Rugby star Ben Cohen backed the Bingham Cup in 2012 as the tournament came to Manchester, and it's seen the numbers of gay men's rugby clubs escalate. It now tours the world biannually, taking Mark's spirit with it.

His mum never misses a tournament. She dedicates her energy to the Bingham Cup and to championing LGBT rights in her son's memory. Alice Bingham is a hero in her own right. The sort of decent, everyday hero who might otherwise have never been noticed, were it not for an atrocity like 9/11 bringing it to the fore; some proof good does come from evil.

"America was spared the sight of the capital in flames that day, and countless lives saved," she speaks. "Just because of my Mark and others' bravery on Flight 93 – and I'm so proud of them. I am. I really, really am."

Now Vice President Joe Biden, one who could've lost his life, said: "I didn't know Mark Bingham, but I wish I had." As his mum gushes with pride at telling his story and of his decency, it's obvious Joe Biden speaks for us all. ■

The Bingham Cup will be next held in Nashville, in the US, in 2016, binghamcup.com, @binghamcup2016

When I first went to a Pride event in Israel back in 2010, I have to say I was rather nervous. I was nervous that I might come under attack, or that there might be a terrorist incident of some kind. I have to say, quite obviously and reasonably, my fear was an attack by an Islamic extremist group, and not by a fellow Jew. But the terrible attack on Jerusalem Pride shows how wrong I was.

On 2 August, 16-year-old Shira Banki died of the stab wounds allegedly inflicted by ultra-Orthodox Jew Yishai Schlissel. He'd been recently released from prison after serving a ten year sentence for a similar – but not fatal – attack on the same Pride celebrations back in 2005.

While the incident is horrific and there are many legitimate questions to the Israeli authorities about why Schlissel wasn't under closer surveillance, there's already hope that can be seen in the darkness and despair about the death of such a young LGBT rights supporter.

Immediately after the stabbing, Benjamin Netanyahu, the right wing Prime Minister of Israel, condemned the incident, saying that it was detrimental to the principles that underpin Israeli society. I've met Mr Netanyahu before and he didn't strike me as a big LGBT rights champion, and I've only heard him speak positively about Israel's record on equality as a way of attacking its Muslim neighbours, some of which execute people for being gay. Now, praising Shira, Mr Netanyahu said she 'courageously supported the idea that everyone is entitled to live their lives in dignity and safety.' He pledged that the murder would not undermine the fundamental values of Israel.

But it wasn't just the Prime Minister. The Orthodox Chief Rabbi of Israel Aryeh Stern visited one of the victims in hospital and posted a photograph of the two of them talking on Facebook, condemning the violence.
It's hard to express quite how groundbreaking this was – ultra-Orthodox Rabbis usually go out of their way to avoid LGBT people and issues. Just days later, he and the other most senior rabbi in the country published a joint statement condemning the attack. Around the world, Jewish people, whether religious or not, have been united in their revulsion of the stabbing.

A pessimistic view of the aftermath is that the response has been simply against violence, what Schlissel did is entirely in contravention of Jewish law, where there's no justification – other than during a war – to kill another person. A pessimist might say 'nothing will change'. But I'm an optimist, not a pessimist. Sometimes something absolutely awful has to happen to make people realise that they must change their ways. Parents around the world who read about the story would contemplate that it was their teenager instead who was stabbed simply for standing up for what she believed, that LGBT people deserve equal rights in a modern society.

While the murder of someone at a Pride event is incredibly rare, LGBT people are murdered for their sexuality or gender identity all over the world

It also graphically and bloodily showed what happens if you do nothing to correct homophobia and transphobia. While the murder of someone at a Pride event is incredibly rare, LGBT people are unfortunately murdered for their sexuality or gender identity all over the world. It's a sobering and distressing fact that, in many countries, you're more likely to be killed if you're transgender than if you're cisgender.

In the coming weeks – as Schlissel goes on trial – parents, teachers, politicians and leaders of other faiths will, I hope, start to question what can be done to prevent this sort of violent prejudice, and will wonder if their own teaching and belief structures have contributed to a situation where a 16-year-old girl gets murdered because LGBT people were marching with pride through the capital of Israel. ■

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With the Rugby World Cup fast upon us, the Herculean James Haskell is hoping to bring victory to England. But there's something else James wants to tackle hard into the mud. As a sign of solidarity with the gay community, James agreed to join us in making a stand to say that homophobia in sport will not be tolerated. With Keegan Hirst's coming out, there's perhaps no better time. And when there's a guy built like a brick shithouse wanting to stand in our corner like this, who're we to say no?

YOU'RE GONNA HEAR HIM ROAR

WORDS RYAN BUTCHER
PHOTOGRAPHY LEE FAIRCLOTH
MAKEUP AND GROOMING LUKE STEPHENS USING KRYOLAN
STYLING STEPHEN CONWAY
PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT ROB ROCHETTE
UNDERWEAR BY CALVIN KLEIN
BLUE SHORTS BY H&M
GREY SHORTS BY TOPMAN
NO LIONS WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS MAGAZINE

They say the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

A couple of months ago, we invited James Haskell – the 6ft 4in, nearly-18 stone, lean, mean rugby playing machine – into our studios.

Why? On the surface, yes, it looks like we've shamelessly whipped his top off and photographed him for your viewing pleasure. But we were also trying to make a point.

James – a flanker for both England and the London Wasps – is one of the most prominent and outspoken athletes in the world standing up for equality and the eradication of prejudice in sport; one of the last big hurdles we face as a community.

But then, just a few days before this issue you're holding in your hands was sent to the printers, we woke to the news that Keegan Hirst – the captain of the Batley Bulldogs – had come out, making him the first ever openly gay professional rugby league player.

It doesn't negate the point we're making with James, though. In fact, it enforces it. Ever since there's been sport stars, there's been gay sport stars – out or not. But whether it's in the terraces, in the homes of people watching on telly, or even on Twitter, sport fans haven't always had the most modern views when it comes to recognising athletes on the LGBT spectrum.

But as 30-year-old James tells us when we catch him on the phone, just hours before our final deadline, the overwhelmingly positive reaction to Keegan's announcement is an encouraging sign we're heading in the right direction.

"It took real strength and courage for Keegan to come out," he declares. "He's a tough guy, and the fact that his team mates, the fans and everybody has taken it so well shows that it CAN be done.

"And it shows that your sexuality really shouldn't matter when it comes to playing sport."

One of the reasons Keegan's announcement is so important is that he's still an active athlete. If we look at football, Justin Fashanu was the first of only two English professional footballers to be openly gay, before his suicide in 1998. Robbie Rogers and Thomas Hitzlsperger both came out after they'd retired from the English Premier League. And Keegan's coming out comes some six years since Gareth Thomas became the first gay rugby union player.

What we're saying is that – as incredible as it is that Keegan has shared his story with the world – it's going to take more than us gays protesting and campaigning to help break that final taboo. We need the help of 'straight allies', too. And there's perhaps no bigger straight ally in sport than James.

"I don't think it was ever a conscious thing that I ever placed on my agenda," he tells us, in between shots, back in our studio. When he isn't dancing around to Hercules and Love Affair, that is. "If I was to turn up for work and I wasn't able to be myself, and I wasn't able to be comfortable, I just think that'd be terrible, you know? I've never really seen anyone as gay or straight or anything like that. If someone comes to me and says, 'I'm gay', or whatever, I just say, 'And what?' As long as people play well, I don't care!"

Considering James walked into our studio with his toenails painted orange – "it was my missus!" – and quizzes us about different aspects of gay sex throughout the day, we're not really surprised by his laid-back approach to sexuality.

"Unfortunately people do still use the word 'gay' as a light-hearted sort of jibe," he continues. "I've certainly been guilty of doing that in the past, and when I was asked about it, I felt TERRIBLE. It must be horrific if people can't be honest with themselves, if they suffer or get bullied. Trying to hide something from people is a nightmare, and I don't think people should have to do that. Especially their sexuality."

We mention to James that most prominent gay sport stars – the aforementioned Rogers and Hitzlsperger, for example – waited until they were away from the public eye before coming out. Keegan now an exception, of course.

"Unfortunately we still live in a world where people feel they have to do that, because it's against the perceived 'normal'," he quips. "Now, I'm not saying it's NOT normal to be gay. There's just a lack of education, which makes gay athletes concerned with the reactions. But in my experience, when people HAVE come out, no one has really batted an eyelid.

"You might get a bit of stick, like you'd get stick for being overweight, or being bald and having terrible teeth. There's that feeling when you put 30 lads in a room and there's a kind of mob mentality, and everyone's jumping on the bandwagon, but then if you catch them individually, they'd be like, 'Listen lad, I don't care if you're gay', you know? It'll be

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great to get to a place where people can be really comfortable about who they are, but I think sometimes for gay athletes, there's a fear of the unknown."

The phrase 'mob mentality' is one that sticks out to us.

"It can sometimes be seen as quite intimidating in a changing room," James explains. "If you walk in and you haven't played well, it's a merciless place! People worry that'd still apply if they came out and said, 'I'm gay, I like men'. Certainly for me, it's not an issue. What's important to me is you're playing well, training well and you're a good lad.

"Take Gareth Thomas. He's one of the toughest guys out there, but then people bring up that stereotype of being gay. It's just ridiculous. What we have to do now is break that down and educate people. If people look at that stereotype in the cold light of day, they'll realise they've actually been pretty stupid for thinking it."

We want to clear something up, before we go on. James hasn't agreed to do this shoot with us because he's got something to sell and he's trying to appeal to the gay market. He's not trying to cash in on the pink pound. He's not trying to pander to us for his own selfish gain. James has a genuine passion to see homophobia kicked out of sport. It's why he let us splash a Rainbow Flag across his enormous chest, for one.

And perhaps, for James, all this started at home. He tells us that he has "loads of gay mates", of course. But on top of that, his brother is an out and proud gay man.

"I remember when he told me and I was like, 'Well, I don't care, get a job,'" James laughs. "That's what I was more interested in than anything else! I hate to think of the fact that he could've been struggling to tell someone. Maybe it was difficult having a brother like me, who's a rugby player and is sort of alpha male, I guess. I was just like, 'I love you, I don't care.'"

It's the kind of reaction most gay guys could only dream of if coming out to their brother.

"I can't imagine how hard it was for him," he continues, "but I guess the problem with it, as it is with anything, is that the reality is very different to what you've built up in your head. I was more interested in him achieving things and making a success of himself. I'm all about motivation and working hard, and what you do sexually or who you fancy isn't anyone's business."

We mention the term 'straight ally' to James. It's not one he's heard before now, but we assure him he fits the bill more than anyone else we can think of.

But we save the biggest question for James till the end. What can we actually do to help boot out homophobia for good? Where do we find the answer? How can we make it easier for people like Keegan?

"The most important thing is that people have a dialogue with one another," he says, "and then maybe we can start eradicating some of the stereotypes. There's different extremes of EVERYONE. There's extreme straight guys, who the very thought of another man touching their leg would make them go absolutely mental. Then there's gay guys who, for all intents and purposes might appear 'straight' – whatever that means! – but happen to like men. And then you'll have guys who come into a room wearing a feather boa and screaming for champagne.

IF I WAS TO TURN UP FOR WORK AND I WASN'T ABLE TO BE MYSELF, AND I WASN'T ABLE TO BE COMFORTABLE, I JUST THINK THAT'D BE TERRIBLE

"Well, I hope so!" he laughs. "Funnily enough, though, I do get more attention from men than women on a night out. Guys are always super complimentary to me. Some are ridiculously forward too, mind, but I don't find it offensive. I find it quite flattering, more than anything."

We talk about the extensive training James has been undertaking for this year's Rugby World Cup – "First and foremost I'm a rugby player, not a bodybuilder, but this has been some of the hardest training of my life" – and what he reckons the chances are of England winning this year's tournament – "We have great coaching staff, great players and, if we get it right, we can beat anyone in the world."

"I don't really think there's such thing as 'black and white' when it comes to sexuality, anyway. There's always a grey area in the middle and people should just do whatever they want to do. We've all just got to remember that one brush doesn't paint all."

And whether that's the brush being used by a heterosexual rugby player's girlfriend to paint his toenails, or a brush for a bunch of gay guys looking to paint the town red, we don't think there's a better lesson we can take away than that. ■

This year's Rugby World Cup will be hosted by England, from 18 September until 31 October, jhbodyfire.com, @jameshaskell

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He's the boyband heartthrob who's turning his hand to being a outspoken figurehead for gay rights. But ahead of an intimate jaunt up and down the country to meet with the legions of Union J fans, Jaymi Hensley talks to us about how Pop Idol changed his life, gay guys in boybands who choose to stay closeted and, urm, crushing on Gareth Gates…

WORDS RYAN BUTCHER

Jaymi Hensley isn't your average pop star. Sure, he looks good, he sounds good and he's shifted thousands of records since Union J first appeared on our telly screens as part of 2012's The X Factor. But the 25-year-old star wants to use his power, and fame, for good.

"Whatever field it is," he starts, "if I go to a party or have to do an interview, I like getting what I want to say across. I like having an opinion and using the platform I've got to the best I can, otherwise I'd be sat at home and I'd never have pursued this career."

It's why, whenever there's an event for an LGBT charity, you'll most likely see Jaymi there, lending his support and helping spread awareness – particularly to his younger fans – that being gay is a-OK. Just a few weeks ago, for example, he hosted the annual RUComingOut charity bash alongside Radio 1's Adele Roberts.

"I massively encourage ANYONE to come out," Jaymi continues. "When fans message me about how they're scared their families might react to being gay, I just tell them 'It's fine', and that's really the message I'm trying to get across.

"I had one from a 15-year-old boy who came out to his mum, who didn't accept him and kicked him out of the house. I asked him, 'What's the problem? Why do you feel bad? Can't you see it's her who's got the problem.' They're back together, now, but he's better off for having accepted that."

Speaking of coming out, Jaymi is in a pretty unique position in that respect as well. There's that old adage that there's always at least one gay guy to every boyband, with tabloids stereotypically hounding, scaremongering and splashing their cash for a chance to reveal gay pop stars to a relatively apathetic public. But Jaymi, in a quite understated way, made his sexuality known pretty much from the off. He never came out, as such, because he was already out, but in the very early stages of his stint on The X Factor, he made sure the voting public knew he was gay.

"I 'came out' six weeks into the competition, but I've been out since I was 14," Jaymi explains. "I didn't come out straight away, because I wanted to be judged on my voice. But because I came out so early, I never really had to think or worry about it. During the show, I didn't think about it, but when we got to the live shows the press were asking questions about girlfriends and partners. There's only so long you can skirt around that question…"

But Jaymi understands why members of boybands – or anyone closeted in the public eye – might choose to keep their sexuality a secret from their fans.

"Everyone is entitled to do whatever they want to do," he says, quite diplomatically. "I'd never push anyone to do anything and I still have friends that aren't out to their parents. But ultimately, I feel sorry for them, because I've been able to live such a full life by being out. And I feel quite sad for them, because it's such a life changing thing. I think everyone will do it when the time is right for them, and it's still taboo for a lot of people, like people in boybands…"

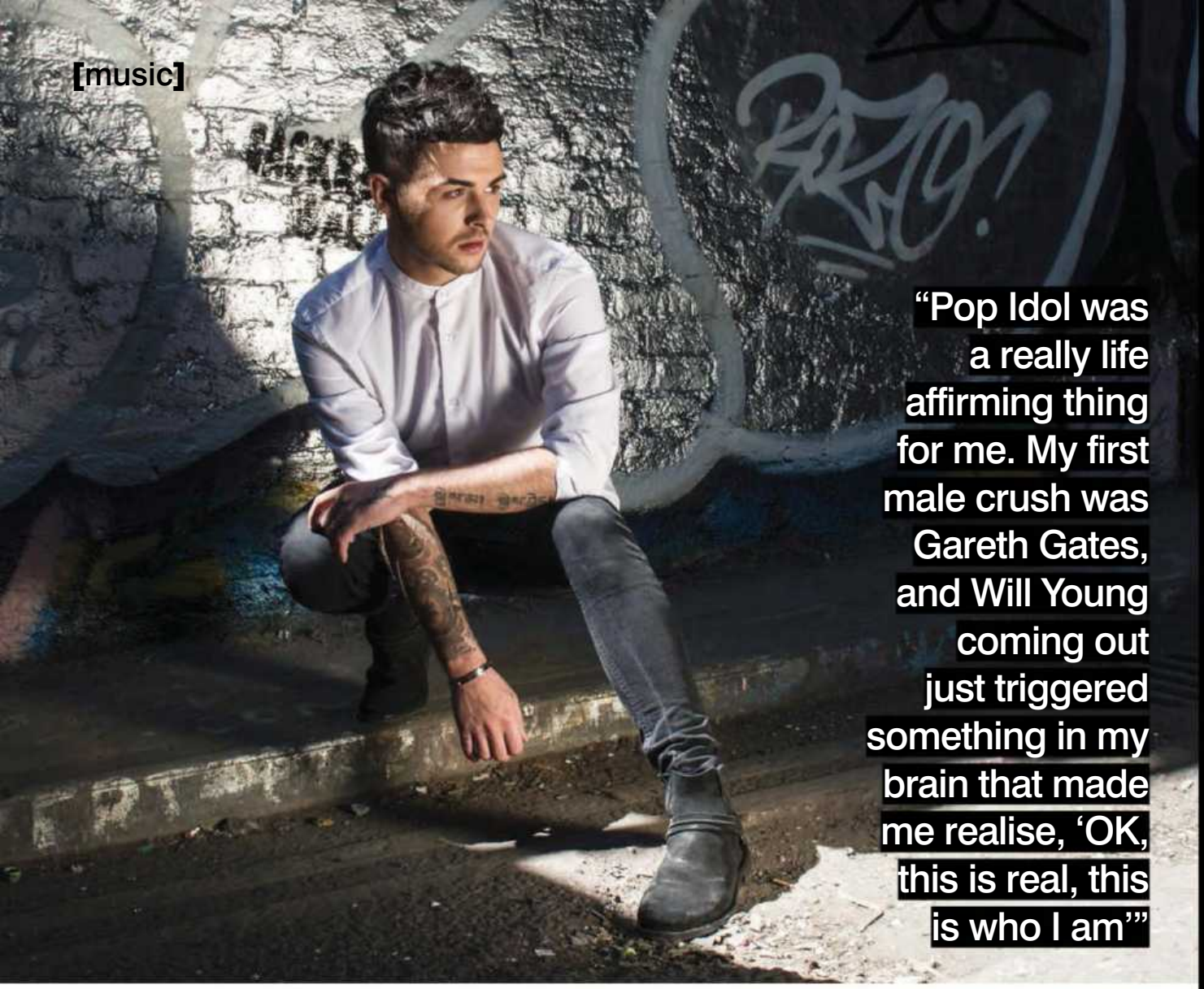
Despite being a positive gay voice within mainstream society, Jaymi would be the first to humbly shrug off any 'role model' or 'inspiration' label thrust upon him.

"I remember when I was growing up," he muses, "I had Stephen Gately and Will Young and all of that. I remember realising I was actually gay when Will came out. I always used to play with Barbies and my Ken dolls always used to share beds together – all those little signs when I look back at it now. And then when I read about Will being gay in the News of the World, I thought it was really brave and it affected me. Here was this young gay man, and middle Britain had voted in their millions for him to win Pop Idol. If you can only affect one kid, though, then that's enough.

"I remember being so pissed off originally that he won – because I was in love with Gareth Gates! But that next week I was like, 'Gareth who?' I love Will because he stood up and did that."

Hold on – in love with Gareth Gates? The kid with the spiky hair?

"Yeah!" Jaymi exclaims with a laugh. "It was ridiculous – I had posters up on my wall and everything. It's going to be really awkward when I see him an event now. But I think Pop Idol, as weird as it sounds, was a really life affirming thing for me. My first male crush and Will coming out



"Pop Idol was a really life affirming thing for me. My first male crush was Gareth Gates, and Will Young coming out just triggered something in my brain that made me realise, 'OK, this is real, this is who I am'"

just triggered something in my brain that made me realise, 'OK, this is real, this is who I am'.

It's this impact of popular culture on the youth of today that's inspired Jaymi to live as openly as he does. And it's partly why he and the rest of the boys – George, Josh and JJ – are going to be travelling to secret locations all across the country throughout October and November for a series of intimate 'An Audience with Union J' gigs.

"What's the point of doing a gig and going out there if you're not gonna speak to the fans," Jaymi says of the dates. "We like to get up close and personal, meet them and hear their ideas of stuff they think we should do. It's not a tour, but more going around the country to different venues, and people coming to sit with us, talk with us, ask us questions and have an intimate experience."

And it's a way for Jaymi to revert back to his modus operandi.

"As much as it's really 'popular' to be gay now, there are still kids that don't know about it – but I think if they see someone being really strong about it, then they're encouraging you to be strong about it too, and say, 'Yeah, OK, I can do this. I can be successful.'

"As much as it's stereotypical to have a gay guy in a boyband, I always wanted to be a singer. But when I was 18, there wasn't Sam Smith, there wasn't Lady Gaga and there wasn't Adam Lambert, so I thought, 'I'm going to have to not be gay. I'm going to have to hide it.' Especially if you're in a boyband after One Direction and it all being about young girls. Being openly gay from a young age like I am, I never thought I'd be in a boyband and have a young girl fan base. So if it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone, and I want to show that."

But it's not just the 'An Audience with…' dates that Jaymi has to look forward to. There's a wedding on the horizon with his long-term partner Olly Marmon: "We've actually just been ring shopping! It's very exciting! But we're not going to get married until it suits us both. We already have it planned, so we know exactly what we're going to do."

And, of course, there's the third Union J album currently in the works: "I was in the studio yesterday with Ben Adams! I was a big A1 fan when I was growing up, so it was a bit weird being in the studio with him. We've got a lot of control now and we want to make sure it's right, so we're not going to rush it."

And with so much going on, it's a surprise Jaymi has time for anything else. "It's all good fun," Jaymi says with a smile. "I like to be busy and I hate it when I'm bored." And for anything else coming up in the future? Well, like us, you're going to want to watch this space. Because it seems that with Jaymi, the sky is well and truly the limit. ■

Tickets for An Audience with Union J are available at unionjofficial.com, @unionjworld, @jaymiujworld

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THE BIG ISSUE

WORDS JOHN MARRS

The rise of STI's means it's never been more challenging for sexually active gay men. But it's not just HIV that's posing a huge risk to our health – syphilis and gonorrhoea are rampaging their way through the gay community, with both infections showing massive year-on-year rises. GT asks why they're on the up and what we should be doing to help protect ourselves

If you enjoy sex, the statistics make for grim reading.

Latest research reveals 439,243 straight and gay people were diagnosed with an STI last year. But the largest group affected by the rise? Gay and bisexual men under the age of 25.

According to figures released by Public Health England (PHE), in 2014 our community saw a 46% rise in cases of syphilis, meaning 3,477 more gay and bi guys learned they were carrying the infection. Chlamydia was up 10% to 1,474 and genital warts cases also rose by 10% to 3,456 cases.

But a rise in gonorrhoea is particularly worrying. Although syphilis has the highest percentage increase, gonorrhoea's 32% increase took the total number of gay carriers last year to 18,029. And because of the rise of antibiotic-resistant strains, it's becoming very hard to treat. Today's strain isn't the same one a gay man in a previous generation might've dealt with. Even the World Health Organization describes drug-resistant gonorrhoea as 'an emergency'.

Dr Gwenda Hughes, head of STI surveillance at PHE, says the rise of cases in the gay community is a worrying trend. "We're dealing with a bacterium that's adept at mutating to develop new resistance, so we can't afford to be complacent," she explains.

"Drug resistance is a very real threat to the treatment of bacterial infections and we must be alert to any new and emerging resistance trends. The stats show that too many people are getting STIs. We're particularly concerned about the large rises in diagnoses among gay men."

Matthew Hodson, chief exec of gay men's health charity GMFA, says before HIV came along, many gay men viewed getting STIs as just one cost of a varied sex life. "HIV changed all that," he recalls, "and though there was never a time when condom use was 100%, the adoption of condoms in the gay community was dramatically impressive. In fact, gay men are still more likely to use condoms for sex than heterosexuals.

"But the concentration on HIV as 'the big one' may've contributed to people feeling like no other

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF STIs

Syphilis
Up 46%
What is it? It's a bacterial infection that starts with a painless, but highly infectious, sore on your genitals or around your mouth. Secondary symptoms include a rash, flu-like illness or patchy hair loss. After many untreated years, syphilis can cause heart problems, paralysis and blindness.
How is it treated? Symptoms can be hard to spot, but a blood test can diagnose you. It's then treated with antibiotics, usually penicillin injections.

Gonorrhoea
Up 32%
What is it? It's a bacterial STI easily passed on during sex. About 10% of men don't experience any symptoms and don't know they're infected. But it can cause pain or a burning sensation when having a wee, a white, yellow or green discharge from the tip of the penis, and tender testicles. You can also have a gonorrhoea infection in your bum, throat or eyes.
How is it treated? It's diagnosed through a urine test or by taking a swab of the affected area. It's then treated with antibiotics, but can lead to serious long-term health problems if left untreated.

Chlamydia
Up 26%
What is it? It's not just something women can get. In men, it causes pain or a burning sensation when you wee; a white, cloudy or watery discharge from your penis, and painful testicles. You can also get it in your bum, throat or eyes.
How is treated? It's done by a urine test or taking a swab of the affected area. The infection is easily treated with antibiotics, but can lead to serious long-term health problems if left untreated, including infertility.

Genital herpes
Up 10%
What is it? It's the same virus that causes cold sores, and rears its ugly head through small, painful blisters or sores which can cause itching or tingling, or make it painful to wee. The virus can then remain inactive for years, but suddenly develop again.
How is treated? There's no cure but symptoms can usually be controlled using antiviral medicines.

Genital warts
Up 10%
What are they? They're spread by skin-to-skin contact – not necessarily through sex – and are small fleshy growths, bumps or skin changes that appear on or around your genitals and bum. They don't hurt but they can go red, itch and sometimes bleed.
How are they treated? By creams and freezing the warts. ■

STI was really an issue. Also, if you think that HIV is the only STI to be concerned about then, there's not much motivation to look after your own sexual health if you HAVE been diagnosed with it. This is why it's vital that sexual health programmes take account of the high numbers of gay men who're living with HIV when planning campaigns."

Samuel, 34, from Birmingham, admits he put any worries about his sexual health to one side when he became single after splitting with his long-term partner. "I had a monogamous relationship with him for eight years and made up for lost time by fucking around when we split up," he tells us. "Most times I was safe, other times I wasn't as I presumed most things are treatable right now.

"I got an full STI test on the request of my new boyfriend and was mortified to learn I had chlamydia in my bum. I didn't even realise men could get it there, but it was utterly mortifying and embarrassing to have to tell my boyfriend that. Thank God it wasn't anything more serious."

Statistics reveal the average Brit has an STI for eight weeks before getting tested, and during that time, more than half are still having sex with the same or more partners. And according to data from HealthExpress, you're more likely to catch an STI in Birmingham than anywhere else in the country. Its survey of 5,000 online consultations claim Birmingham is followed by East London, Glasgow and South East London as STI hot spots.

But it's not just the UK where the problem lies. In the US, where gay STIs are also on the rise, casual dating apps are taking the blame. A 2013 study in Los Angeles revealed gay men using apps to find partners were more likely to have gonorrhoea and chlamydia than those who met online or in clubs. The report by the Department of Health, concluded: 'Technology is redefining sex on demand. Advances which improve the efficiency of meeting anonymous sexual partners may have the unintended effect of creating networks of individuals where users may be more likely to have sexually transmissible infections.'

Matthew Hodson believes there have been enormous changes in social attitudes to sex and sexuality over the last few decades. "The average gay man probably doesn't have as many partners as some may think, but we still tend to have more sex partners than our heterosexual brothers," he explains.

"The probability of picking up an STI increases with the more sexual partners you have. Some data suggests the proportion of gay men who've lots of sexual partners hasn't changed all that much. But with hook-up apps now being the most popular way of meeting other guys for sex – and more sex parties – the potential to have really high numbers of sexual partners has increased.

"Syphilis can be fatal if not detected in time. Hepatitis C can cause long-term damage to your health and there's no vaccine to prevent it. Gonorrhoea is becoming resistant to the drugs that are currently used to treat it, with no new treatments imminent."

So what can we do to help ourselves? Public Health England recommends three ways to reduce the spread of STIs – using condoms, reducing your number of sexual partners and not overlapping your sexual relationships. And gay men are urged to have a full HIV and STI screen at least annually, or every three months if having condomless sex with new or casual partners.

"Health promotion and education to increase risk awareness and encourage safer sexual behaviour remain the cornerstones of STI prevention," adds Dr Hughes. "Prevention work should continue to focus on people in the groups at highest risk of infection, such as young people and gay men." ■

HIV

What is it?
The HIV virus attacks and weakens the immune system, making it harder to fight infections and disease. It's passed on through unprotected sex and coming into contact with infected blood, like sharing needles to inject steroids or drugs. AIDS is the final stage of an HIV infection, when your body can no longer fight life-threatening infections.
How is it treated?
A simple blood test is usually used to test for an HIV infection. There's no cure for HIV, but treatments allow most people to live long and healthy lives.

Trichomoniasis

What is it?
A tiny parasite that might make your wee burn, plus a whitish discharge from your penis. It can also cause a sore foreskin.
How is it treated?
It's hard to diagnose, so doctors often refer you to a specialist clinic for a urine or swab test. Once diagnosed, it can usually be treated with antibiotics.

Crabs

What are they?
Pubic lice can crawl from person to person through close genital contact. They're usually found in pubic hair, but can also live in hairy armpits, chest hair, beards, eyebrows or eyelashes.
How are they treated? You don't need to shave off your hair – special creams or shampoos are available over the counter in most pharmacies.

Scabies

What are they?
They're tiny mites that burrow into the skin that can be passed on through close body or sexual contact, or from infected clothing, bedding or towels. They make you itch, usually at night and often around your groin. They're also found between fingers, on wrists and ankles.
How are they treated? Like crabs, you can buy over the counter remedies from pharmacies. ■

IT WAS GREAT WHEN IT ALL BEGAN...

40 YEARS OF THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

LITTLE NELL COLUMBIA

"When it came out it was so new, but first, all the songs are great, so that's one aspect that people… I don't know if they think about that as much, obviously, but every song is great and the sex factor… The cross dressing, heterosexual, and bisexual, homosexual – don't dream it be it, all these aspects of the show I think have liberated so many people and given them licence to follow their instincts and their dreams and how they feel they really are."

"The number of fans that I've met that explain how they've been born in these tiny towns and, whatever their dreams are, feeling like they're the only one. And then a cinema somewhere in the vicinity will start doing Rocky Horror and there'll be a cast, and then that becomes their new family. They don't feel judged, they feel like they can do whatever they want to do and dress up as a girl if they're boys or, you know, etcetera."

"It's given so many people so much pleasure and I love that it's helped people come out of the closet – and it's made people aware that being gay is totally acceptable. What I'm always saying is you don't choose to be gay, you don't choose to be bisexual, you know? It's not a choice – you're born a certain way and so you know."

"The first time someone asked me to sign my autograph on their upper thigh, they then came back two hours later and they'd had it tattooed. I mean, I didn't find that strange. I suppose I found it perhaps alarming that they were going to be stuck with my name on them."

"People think, 'Oh, you get driven mad by being associated with it.' Well, you know, I never have. It's always flattering people enjoy seeing you in something. I was just lucky that I got cast in it. I mean, it wasn't me – Richard O'Brien was the person who wrote the brilliant piece. And I think Jim Sharman's direction of it, his casting of it and Brian Thompson's set design all contributed enormously to the piece as a whole."

"I think it was only about five weeks filming or something, fairly short. And a musical you've got to multiply by three, for a musical it's so much harder to do, to shoot."

"We all had a great laugh, it was pretty stress free as we were all familiar with the roles. Except Susan [Sarandon], Barry [Bostwick] and Charles Gray, we didn't know him, but other than that we knew everybody. And Meat Loaf, actually, but we all got to know Meat Loaf real quick. We all got on really well and it was a blast. It was as much as blast for us – actually I don't know if Tim would say that – because obviously he had a lot of pressure on him. But for me, darling, the household groupie, you know, just fabulous."

The Rocky Horror Picture Show has never been pulled from circulation by 20th Century Fox, making it the longest-running film on release in cinema history. ■ The film is based on the musical, The Rocky Horror Show, which opened in London in 1973. The original cast reprised their roles in the movie. ■ The movie depicts a man marrying a man. It took 40 years for America to catch up. ■

"If I was asked, I could pull out that tap dance in no time."

"What's the point? Once something is a classic I just don't see the point in remaking it. Gone with the Wind – why would you remake that? And Rocky Horror is definitely a classic now. There are certain films – like The Sound of Music, one of the greatest films ever made – what's the point of recasting it, or redoing it? Because, you know, part of its deliciousness is that THAT is it." ■

IMAGES COURTESY OF JOHN WATERS / PARK CIRCUS / NEW LINE CINEMA / LE STUDIO CANAL / FINE LINE / SAVOY / UNIVERSAL

Hag in a Black Leather Jacket (1964)

There was no shocking memory but it was MADE! I didn't know there was editing, I thought what came out of a camera was the final cut. And in this case, it was.

It was never reviewed. It was only shown once in a beatnik house and the next time it was shown was at Lincoln Center last year [laughs]. No, there was no reviews of that movie, no one took notice really.

I'm a believer in Dogme 95, I wanted Lars von Trier's insane theory to go. I wish all movies weren't edited at all – just whatever came out the camera was it.

It's not even a film, it's more like it's being shown in, I guess, a historical context just to see kind of what a home movie was like. I lived in my parents' house when we made that, none of the Dreamlanders are in it except Mary Vivian Pearce. She's the only one that's been in every single one of the movies and she IS in it, she's the only one. The rest are high school friends that I quickly just really moved away from [laughs].

Roman Candles (1966)

In Roman Candles, you can see Divine when he was… They're home movies, they're like things a kid would make on his cell phone today, only it was an 8mm camera. But yes, you can see Mink and Divine and everything, when they were very, very young. So I'm saying you can see the seeds of what we later became very much in them, and that's why I think is the only reason I'm letting 'em be shown.

The most outstanding memory to me was Maelcum Soul was in it. Maelcum was my first, first star – before Divine. Maelcum was a female, but she was a female impersonator also, in a way. She was a beatnik goddess in Baltimore and she was also famous in New York. And Divine was scared of her! You can see how Maelcum looks in that movie, which is how she looked every single day of her life, you can see the great effect she had on all the men and women that I knew.

We premiered it at the Flower Mart, which was a local big festival that hippies and old ladies went to, and it was a clash always between these two groups. So we had the premiere, but in the daytime in a church, which was kind of eyebrow-raising. I think it was reviewed in the Baltimore Sun. And it was good, it was my first blurb.

There's no point in changing. I mean, if I had the chance, yeah, I would've changed plenty of things. But you know what? The few times I look at all my old work, it's usually when I have to appear in person with it. Of course you see things you've learned you wish you'd changed. That or, 'Christ you couldn't even get that in focus!' Or, 'Cut that, Christ it's too long.' But you know what? These are time capsules, these are filmed 45 years ago. Roman Candles came out in 1966. How long ago was that? Fifty years almost! So basically, no, there's no point in changing anything, it's to see what you were like then. Everybody changes.

It was a blatant copy of Chelsea Girl. And Dreamland Studios, that was the bedroom at my parents' house. You can see what my bedroom looked like. And the most shocking scene, I think I had people shooting up in it, that was very much also influenced by Chelsea Girl.

Eat Your Makeup (1968)

We recreated the entire Kennedy assassination a few years after it happened for real – with Divine as Jackie crawling over the trunk of the car and everything. It was filmed on the street in my parents neighbourhood and the neighbours were horrified. I look back on it and think, "What were we thinking?" I found out years later that Warhol did a movie called Still at the exact same time we were making this. Only, it was the Kennedy assassination, but they didn't even have a car – they just filmed it on

Top to bottom
Hag in a Black Leather Jacket still, Roman Candles flyer and still, Eat Your Makeup flyer and still.

a couch. So mine was a bigger budget, if you can imagine that…

Mondo Trasho (1969)

The most shocking memory was definitely when we were arrested for conspiracy to commit indecent exposure in the middle of a shoot. So definitely that was the thing I remember most.

It got a good review in Variety and, way later, its claim to fame was when Pauline Kael, the very famous American film critic, reviewed Fellini's Satyricon. She called it, in the headline in the New Yorker, "Fellini's Mondo Trasho". So yes, Mondo Trasho was reviewed in Variety and something called Show Magazine then. They both were favourable, which is amazing when you look back on it.

(1970)

The rosary job is the most shocking scene in that. I think that still rivals eating shit in Pink Flamingos. Actually, it's maybe worse. So that one I'd think is the most shocking scene in it.

It's not in distribution at all and we're trying to work out some issues where there was, and it's going to come out again soon.

There were reviews in the paper – that was the one that said my first talkie was my first real sickie. We got negative, horrified reviews. But they were good, we used them.

The most appalling thing is the Sharon Tate murders happened and they'd not caught Manson. Nobody knew who did, and we said WE did it. My God, what was I thinking?

(1970)

Oh, that's not even a real movie, that was just to test the camera. But Diane Linkletter had jumped out of a window and killed herself that day, so we filmed it and had it in the theatre before the funeral. That was fairly tasteless… And it led to a whole genre of movies including The Cockettes version of Tricia's Wedding, which was when Nixon's daughter Patricia Nixon got married and the Cockettes did a drag ceremony of it at the exact same time. They filmed it and it came out that day, too. So it started a very short lived genre of drag queens doing serious current events.

It's ten minutes and it seems like 30 – it's the only one of my films where the actor's adlib and you can see that maybe they weren't used to it.

Pink Flamingos (1972)

The most shocking scene to me is not the eating shit. Probably the artificial insemination shot is the most repulsive in it, I think. And the girl I asked to play the kidnapped girl, who was quite pretty, refused to show her real vagina. I had to hire another girl that was about 30 pounds heavier. To this day, my friend is pissed about it because people think that, not only would she not do it, but people think she has fat legs and they weren't hers.

Oh my God, there were so many [bad reviews] – just look at the poster! I guess Variety said it was the most repulsive film ever made, that was pretty good. It's a different time, that could never happen today. In those days there was a cultural war going on – basically it was us vs them. Now all film critics are hip, they'd never do that – they'd never be so stupid as to write those reviews that could help a movie so much.

I don't think it's my best movie, but it'll be in the first paragraph of my obituary no matter what I do.

(1974)

The day we filmed Divine fucking himself – basically, he played the man and the woman – we first did it with him as the man, because he had whiskers and he had to go home, shave and get in drag. And we had a double, so we had to go back and forth. I guess that was the most shocking, because we did it outside without asking permission. There were garbage men nearby watching; they were

Top to bottom
Mondo Trasho, Multiple Maniacs flyer, Pink Flamingos, Female Trouble poster

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What can be said about John Grant that hasn't been said before? It'd be a cliché to call him the greatest motherfucker that we're ever gonna meet, right? After all, it's the chorus for GMF – probably the track most people know him for, from his magnum opus Pale Green Ghosts.

But while GMF is a proclamation laced in irony and self-doubt, as we're sat with John among the hustle and bustle of London on a sunny summer afternoon, we can't help but think, well, yes, he IS the greatest motherfucker.

John is a rare breed for journalists. He's an anomaly; a white whale swimming through a sea of clickbait banality. Even though he has a new album and tour to flog, when you speak with John, you're not getting the usual soulless 'on brand' QVC-esque hawking, while a record label exec breathes down his neck. You're getting honesty, sincerity and a bloke who's striving to be what we're all striving to be – gay and happy.

"I don't believe my story is important," he tells us, quite matter-of-factly. "It's just as important or unimportant as anyone else's. And I'm not coming out with this new music on a brand new topic – this is an album about love and the horror of not being able to love someone back once you've found them, because you're SO incapable of loving yourself. It's the ultimate horror story!"

But as bleak as that might sound, it'd be just as clichéd to talk about John's sadness.

It's well documented that after the implosion of his 90s alt-rock band The Czars, John spent a number of years struggling with addiction to drugs and alcohol, his HIV status, heartbreak and ultimately thinking he'd never make music again.

But actually, the John Grant sat before us in 2015, whose eyes dart back and forth as pretty young things walk by our table, is in a much better place. Don't be fooled by anyone trying to tell you that the godfather of electro-gloom is doing anything but finally letting his hair down and having a bit of fun. You only need to listen to his superb new album – Grey Tickles, Black Pressure – to know that's the case.

"You can hear it's coming from a better place," he confesses. "And if it sounds like I had fun making it, it's because I did!"

It's why the album – his third, for those counting – is made up of tracks like the orchestral Global Warming, the cinematic Geraldine, and You and Him – a scuzzy yet gleeful cacophony of distorted guitars and electro swathes, with the kind of flippant wordplay that'd make Oscar Wilde blush.

"Oh yeah, it's a funky album," John laughs, when we propose that it's his most danceable to date. "I don't want to compare myself to Grace Jones in any way, but it has that slow grove. I love noise, and distorted guitars, and on this album I just wanted to be NASTY. To portray anger and lose myself in that.

Talk turns to another of the album's standout tracks, Voodoo Doll – a twistingly electronic ode to friendship, with a baseline akin to Parliament-Funkadelic, and a clearcut message about trying to help someone "who's super depressed".

"I understand depression," John starts, "I've dealt with it. People tell you you're sick, that there's something wrong with you – that you have an abnormality that makes it impossible for you to have relationships in the real world. Depression made me not want to do anything, so I know what people mean when they say they can't get out of bed.

"But there are people out there – especially men – who can't talk about it, because it's seen as a weakness."

And it's something that's affecting gay men more than most, as John knows too well. Growing up in the suburbia of Parker, Colorado, he was always told his sexuality was an illness that needed curing. Even by his parents, thanks to their antiquated Christian views.

"They weren't the type to tell me to get out of their house," he explains. "It was a tender, 'We love you, but you need to be fixed.' If you've dealt with that for the first 20 years of your life, its hard to get past that. You're told that being who you are is an abomination to the Lord and you're letting your family down – how can you put that on a child?"

But that's exactly what John, now 48 years old, has been trying to do – get past it.

Before he was clean of his addictions, he tried to put his depression and anxiety behind him with drugs, sex and booze. "It was avoidance behaviour," he tells us, "an escape. I used those things to not have to deal with anything at all. I went out and I didn't care that I contracted HIV – it's painful now to think that I didn't care."

Whereas now, he's solely relying on his music: "I've been challenging my depression and self-loathing. I challenged all these things that I thought of myself. But once you develop a severe anxiety

THE GREATEST MOTHERFUCKER

WORDS RYAN BUTCHER

disorder that's routed in your entire upbringing, things blossom and it's hard to counteract that."

It's a topic he discusses in the title track to his new album – arguably the predecessor to the aforementioned GMF. A lyric in particular sticks out to us: 'And there are children who have cancer, and so all bets are off, because I can't compete with that.'

To the untrained ear, this might be the case of John living up to his downtrodden reputation. What other modern musician would write a chorus – for what's quintessentially a pop song – about kids with cancer? But we put to him that it's really a lyric born from his progression, his growth, his "moving past things".

"Well, yes," he muses, "it was a joke about still being able to be selfish, but being aware that there are worse scenarios in the world than my own. What happened to you is important and what happened to me, which gave me anxiety, is important too. But it's important to sort yourself out, get out into the world and help others. When you think about kids with bone marrow cancer that have more confidence and more courage than so many other people – and they haven't even had the chance to live yet!"

In our afternoon with John – which starts to feel like a therapy session, a cathartic experience for both of us – there are few stones that're left unturned.

We put to him that the key to being gay and happy is learning to respect yourself – especially when it comes to sex.

"Absolutely!" he declares. "There're a lot of gay men that are horrified by that behaviour, and think of themselves as trashy whores. Fuck those self-loathing fuckers. And then you get the other side, where these narcissists would never dream of having super hot sex to feel desired. Good for them, but that wasn't the case for me."

And when it comes to the recent media hysteria surrounding chemsex and chill out parties, John suggests it's linked to some gay men's inability to be truly intimate with another person: "I don't have a Grindr account – I can't have anything to do with that world, I'd go ape shit over it. I don't want to get lost in it – it doesn't lead to anything good for me. I've found an incredible guy anyway, and I have a hard time dealing with intimacy because of the way I've lived my life."

Oh, and the ol' #masc4masc conversation rears its ugly, beefed up head, too. "I feel like society tells us only certain types of gay is OK. If you're a buff dude or a true artist, then you're fine. If you're going to be gay, you'd better be Freddie Mercury or Gareth Thomas – who's one fine motherfucker. Yikes."

But we think the best way to sum up John Grant in 2015 is, when on the subject of his anxiety and his depression, we ask if he ever feared he'd never find someone who loved him for who he was.

"I've never thought I'm totally unlovable," he says as a wry smile spreads across his face. "I've always had a great sense of humour and great taste. I didn't think I was great looking, but I can speak several languages." He chuckles: "You could do worse! I've done well, considering from where I've come from."

Well John, as you're on the brink of releasing a career-defining album, cementing yourself as a voice of a generation – we couldn't agree more.

He's the greatest motherfucker, after all. ■

Grey Tickles, Black Pressure is released through Bella Union on 2 October, John Grant is on tour in the US, Iceland and Europe from October to December, including London on 12 November, johngrantmusic.com, @johnwgrant

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A Peccadillo Pictures Release

★★★★★

"Futuro Beach is a cinematic treat"
Front Row Reviews

★★★★

"Beautifully shot melancholy meditation on identity and love"
Empire

★★★★

DEADLIER THAN THE MALE

WORDS DARREN SCOTT

•How long have you got?Ž

We•ve just asked Natalie Imbruglia if we can talk about men. It•s a topic we•re both pretty well versed in, after all. She gives a knowing look and gets comfy.

But no, we•re not digging tabloid-style into that side of things. We are, of course, referring to her new album, Male. A collection of songs originally recorded by … you guessed it … male artists.

•I guess you can say it•s a concept album, it•s not like I was trying to be overly clever. There•s just something about flipping the sex of it that isn•t going head-to-head with something in the same way. Does that make sense?

•Emotionally you•re coming from a different place to the way a man delivers a song. It•s not the first time anyone has done an album like this, but it•s what I wanted to do. It•s a collection of songs reflecting how I was feeling at that time.Ž

A lot of it is, we suggest, quite melancholy.

•I like all of that,Ž she shrugs. •I think melancholic music makes you feel less alone, •cause you•re like, •They get it.• It•s quite a cathartic album. There•s hopeful songs on there too.Ž

Talking of a certain sadness, she•s not had any feedback from Daft Punk on her cover of Instant Crush. •I•m a big fan, so I hope they don•t hate it.Ž

It•s Natalie•s first album in six years … although technically, Come to Life was never officially released in the UK.

•It never came to life,Ž she laughs. •The irony!Ž

When pushed as to why, she replies quickly.

•You•ll have to ask the record company. You•d have to ask them. I look forward, I don•t look back. At the time it was just too much politics for me. I was kind of so over the industry, I wanted to take a break from the music. I think it•s really important to follow your joy and, if you•re not enjoying something, you know*ƒ*

•It knocked me about a bit. I just wanted to step away from it. Sometimes you can•t think clearly about whether it•s the right thing to do or not the right thing to do and, you know, it was. The opportunity came up to do The X Factor and that•s what I wanted to do at that moment, and I didn•t look back.Ž

She thinks it•s •horribleŽ that Louis has been given the chop from the show, saying that she loves him, and that although she wasn•t asked to return, she•s open to the idea.

•It•s like being on a soap. I remember when I was on Neighbours, it was the same. I was more famous then than I•ll ever be, because you•re in peoples• living room and they feel like you•re a part of their family. And the same way with The X Factor, when it gets into momentum, it•s like peoples• everyday. But then again it goes away in between. These things are all transient.Ž

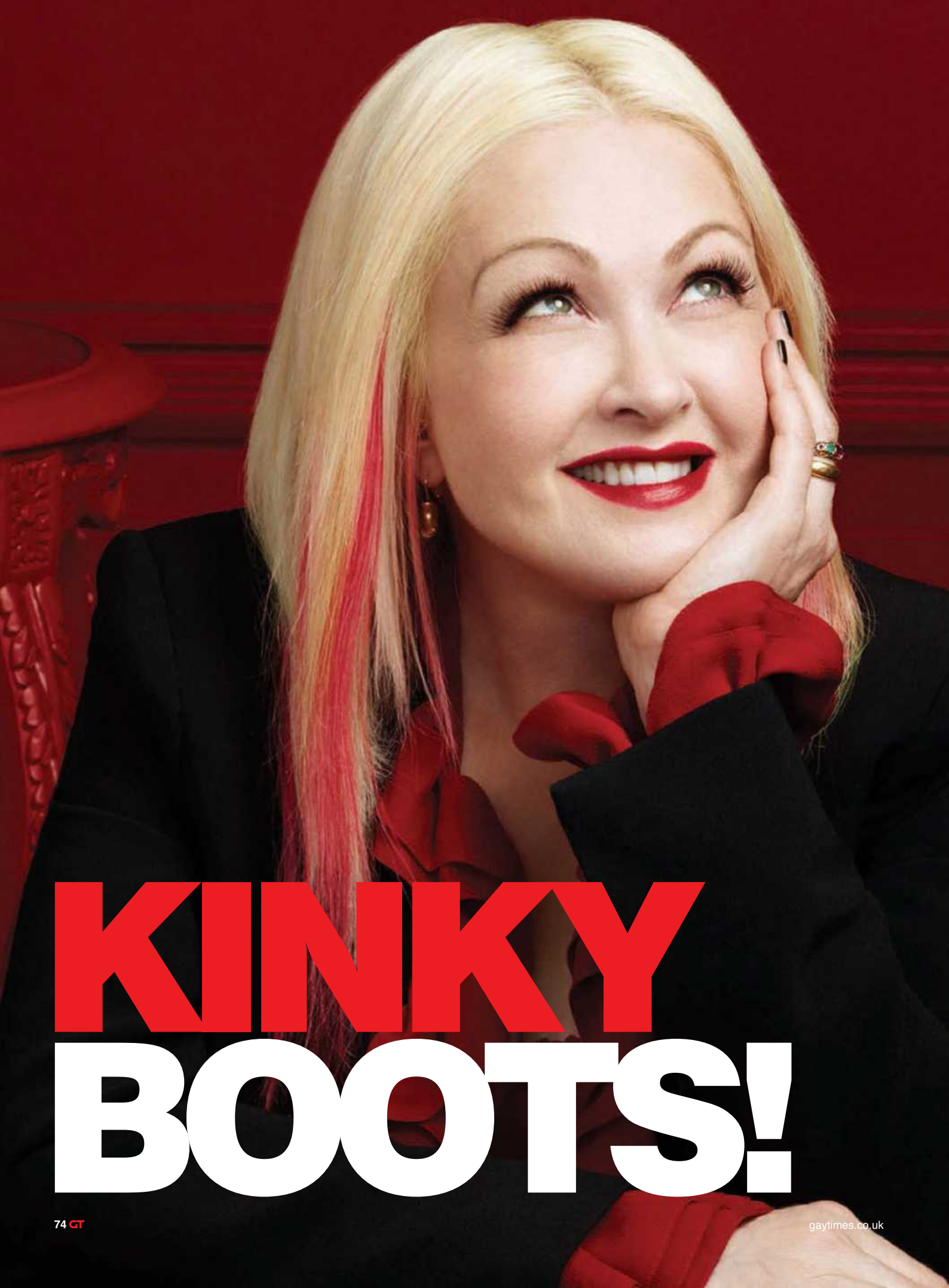
When we catch up with Natalie in a London members club, she•s just got over a bout of laryngitis … but managed to perform for Prince Albert in Monaco, she casually drops in. She mentions she•s had vocal surgery in the past.

•I was terrified, I was working with a producer in LA and he actually got Elton John on the phone to convince me to do it, because I was so scared to do it*ƒ*Ž

If you•re going to get anyone to convince you*ƒ*

She laughs. •Well, if Elton says it•s OK, then it•s OK.Ž

Did the vocal surgery perhaps



KINKY BOOTS!

From True Colours to Into The Nightlife, countless of our best evenings have been soundtracked by this music icon. With a career that spans more than 30 years, nine studio albums and a hit Broadway smash, Cyndi Lauper is finally helping London get kinky, bringing her acclaimed musical to the West End. Everybody say YEAH! Cyndi, welcome home

WORDS WILLIAM CONNOLLY **IMAGES** GAVIN BOND AND MATT CROCKETT

"The phone rings, in the middle of the…" OK, we have to admit, we can't think of Cyndi Lauper without any number of her iconic hits getting stuck in our heads. It's a problem we face moments before our interview with the woman herself. But after a few pleasantries, and getting over the realisation we're in the company of music royalty, talk quickly turns kinky. Kinky Boots, that is.

"We're coming home," Cyndi proudly proclaims as she begins to tell us of her imminent arrival in the UK. "The cast are wonderful and that's the killer – the cast. They're really great, and they're English, so everything just feels so right."

Based on the 2005 film, Kinky Boots follows the unlikely friendship of local drag queen Lola and factory owner Charlie Price. Following his father's death, Charlie fights to keep his family business open while learning a few things about the true meaning of acceptance. Add a troupe of drag queens, or Angels as they're better known here, and you've the recipe for a smash-hit show.

But with a music career and reputation to uphold, how did Kinky Boots strut into her life? With a little help from her friends, of course – Kinky Boots writer Harvey Fierstein and director Jerry Mitchell.

CYNDI LAUPER MUSIC AND LYRICS

"Years ago now, Harvey asked if I'd write music for him," Cyndi begins. "He asked if I'd consider being involved with a new show he was creating called Kinky Boots and from there, he sent me ideas for songs and we both instantly connected.

"This one time, Harvey told me to write a song called Sex Is in the Heel, and I did. I sent it to him, he and Jerry gave me advice and then we had it. From then, he told me never to change it and I never did."

With musical influences from the likes of Boy George and his dance-pop show Taboo, upbeat tracks twisted with heavy ballads became the goal. Yet, Cyndi admits, she was never totally sure she was heading in the right direction for Broadway success.

"It was hard, but I wanted to do it, because Harvey was a friend and Jerry Mitchell was a friend. You can't work really hard on something with your friends and not have success. It was all or nothing for me."

A well-documented LGBT activist, Cyndi's anything but afraid to speak her mind on issues from within the community, and she's even been recognised for her activism by President Obama and was an invited guest at his second-term inauguration. And her outspoken ways, like her creativity, occasionally came at the most unexpected time.

"Once, I came up with an idea under the hairdryer and I called Harvey, and all he could hear was the noise from the dryer and not me. I just thought of things and he'd tell me what he thought. Often, very directly," she laughs.

After four years of changes, Kinky Boots was finally ready for an audience. But not all her musical creations were ready for such a public outing. "I wrote a few numbers, and Jerry and Harvey both were just like, 'Really!?' And I had to go back and change a lot."

With productions across the world, Kinky Boots has spread its wings to international success. "The weird thing about this show for me is, I knew absolutely nothing," she begins. "When you know nothing, everything is possible. I'd keep asking Harvey and Jerry what the rules were, and they told me there ARE no rules."

And still, two years since she hit the bright lights of Broadway, Cyndi's

more than happy to stay hooked in this world of make believe.

"I come from a world where there's so many fucking rules and everybody's got their fucking hand up. It just wasn't like that in this show. It was one for all and all for one."

A short while after opening in New York, Cyndi found recognition come in the form of an unlikely way, when she was awarded a Tony Award for Best Original Score; making her the first female to ever win the award for solo work. She even became the first artist in more than 25 years to top the charts with a Broadway track, and the cast recording of Kinky Boots took the Grammy for Best Musical Theatre Album in 2014.

"When it sunk in after getting the Tony, I started crying! It all became too much. I was walked through this project by fucking pros," she proudly proclaims. "I love this community and I can finally say that I feel a part of it, properly."

With the UK getting ready to welcome the red boots to this side of the pond, Cyndi's keen to assure us the British accents would be as authentic as possible. Yet, things didn't always go that way in New York. "I'd write stuff and Harvey's computer programme would correct my language," she tells us. "So I'd write back and say, 'Why are you changing my work?' He said he hadn't, but it was different."

And the boots? Well, she just couldn't resist... "My legs aren't too bad. I mean, the rest of me isn't quite as young as before, but the legs are still good."

The message of Kinky Boots is still at the heart of why Cyndi just couldn't say no to this new adventure.

"People want the same shot at equality, and the fact that this show is about all different people coming together for a common cause, and succeeding together, can resonate with anyone. In the end, it isn't Lola that needs to be accepted, it's Charlie. And that, to me, says it all."

Regarded as one of the greatest women in rock and roll, and as one of only 20 artists to achieve "GET" status by winning Grammy, Emmy and Tony awards, Cyndi Lauper has proven to even her biggest critics that she's worthy of her long line of accolades. And although she admits she's "too busy right now", Cyndi promises new music isn't that far from pounding through our headphones once again.

"I come from a world where there's so many fucking rules and everybody's got their fucking hand up. It just wasn't like that in this show. It was one for all and all for one."

But it seems that the magical world of theatre was never really a stranger at all for her. If anything, it's been with her the entire time.

"This project has taught me that in the end, you can search the world, but sometimes, if you look in your own backyard, all the things you dreamed of are probably already there. And Broadway, for me, is my backyard."

And it seems the boots are here to stay for just a little while longer... "I feel like Dorothy. I'm with the scarecrow and the lion – with my two friends. Yet this time, I have red boots, not shoes." ■

@cyndilauper, #londongetskinky

Left
Killian Donnelly, Matt Henry and Amy /HQQR[IURP WKH cast of the London show
Right
Jerry Mitchell with Harvey Fierstein and Cyndi

JERRY MITCHELL DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Were there ever any concerns about turning a movie into a stage musical? Absolutely not! New producers come to me with a DVD, not a book QRZ ,W·V MXVW WKH ZD\ things go nowadays. When did you realise this show had the possibility to be a hit? When we were in our last presentation in New York, before we moved outta town, and we were doing a presentation to an invited audience. I had a pair of red boots made for the rehearsal room and asked a big, butch guy who played Don LI KH·G FRPH RXW wearing my boots. He did and I saw grown men literally cry. Laughing. Cheering. The lot. Then I realised this could really work. And working with your two friendsƒ Cyndi, Harvey and I all knew each other before this process and all three of us are cut from the same cloth. We believe everybody should be free to be who they wanna be, so working on the show was easy, as we all wanted to make the same FKDQJH WR SHRSOH·V OLYHV DIWHU WKH\·YH seen it. Why does a story about drag queens and a shoe factory work? Easy … inclusion. I think that people, at the heart, want a place where people are all created equal and can have freedom like their neighbour. At the end, each Angel dances with a factory worker in matching boots and LW·V OLNH WKH\·YH FRPH to accept the other person from another world. You also tackle the backlash of joining these two worldsƒ I call it •those ten SDJHVµ DV LW·V WKH moment when the rug is pulled from both characters … and for the audience as well. ,W·V DQ XQH[SHFWHG moment in a show that focuses on seeing the good in everyone. $QG WKHUH·V D QHZ girl in townƒ Matt is Lola. You gonna WOW the crowds. This entire cast will and, I think, in these ÀUVW ÀYH ZHHNV RI UHKHDUVDOV WKH\·YH surpassed the RULJLQDO FDVW :H·YH been able to share all the information WKDW ZH·YH JRW WR channel that and it puts them all ahead. And the accents? OH MY GOD, 7+(<·5(62 08&+ %(77(5 >/DXJKV hysterically] We visited the factory in Northampton with the entire cast one day and even have a dialect coach now. :H·UH JHWWLQJ WKH •OK, me duckŽ in there too. Q #MDPP\SURG #londongetskinky.

too.... NO PRESSURE! Arghhhh! [Laughs] You've got an amazing song writer, lyricist and musician in Cyndi attached at the heart of this show, and that's something very special for me.

Does she like Matt's version of Lola? I think so! I met her in New York when I saw the show and sang for her. When I'd finished, she actually said, "Oh my God, I've heard people sing this and everyone brings something to this song. But you've brought something that I've never seen." I was just in total shock after.

Do you have a favourite song of Cyndi's to sing? When I sing Hold Me in Your Heart almost at the end of the show, Lola's back where she began with her father and that's where the tears come for me. With Cyndi's music, and I wear this gorgeous long dress, I really do feel like Whitney. [Laughs] It's such a special moment.

And you're backed by six fellow drag queens with your Angels... My girls. The Angels. They're beyond fierce. I've been having make up tutorials for the last few months, but I haven't seen them in full face. It was a beautiful surprise when they saw me and I saw all my girls. Jerry even said that these are the hottest girls from any production around the world. We're also the tallest in the heels at around 7ft.

Do you have an outfit planned for opening night? Are the heels making an appearance? I've been a little busy with the show BUT there's a suit that I want. [Pauses] Look, I'll just wear a jockstrap and the boots... Hopefully I'll look faaaaabulous, darling!

And finally, why should audiences come and see Kinky Boots? This is a wonderful, heartwarming and generous story of the most unlikely of friends. The message of a true friendship, a true relationship and showing the world that you really can change the world if you change your mind. ■

@mrmatthenry, #londongetskinky.

Kinky Boots is now playing at the Adelphi Theatre, London, @kinkybootsuk, kinkybootsthe-musical.co.uk.

What made you want to audition for this role? I just couldn't help but be uplifted by the message. It's really touching.

Cyndi described Kinky Boots as coming home to the UK. Would you agree? Totally! We're making it our own here in London. We've started changing words like laundromat, which they'd use on Broadway, to make it sound even more British than before. It's the little things that's making Kinky Boots feel very at home here in London.

And her music? This is pop and rock music for the stage. We've had our musical supervisor Stephen Oremus teaching us how to twist what we already know and to match what Cyndi's written. I was expecting a jukebox musical, but they're all original songs for each character. She's incredible.

How does your co-star Matt look as drag queen Lola? OH MY GOD! He's got the tits for it. They're MASSIVE! I keep whacking them and saying, "Mate, you look gorgeous," and he replies with "thanks". This is my job, I LOVE IT!

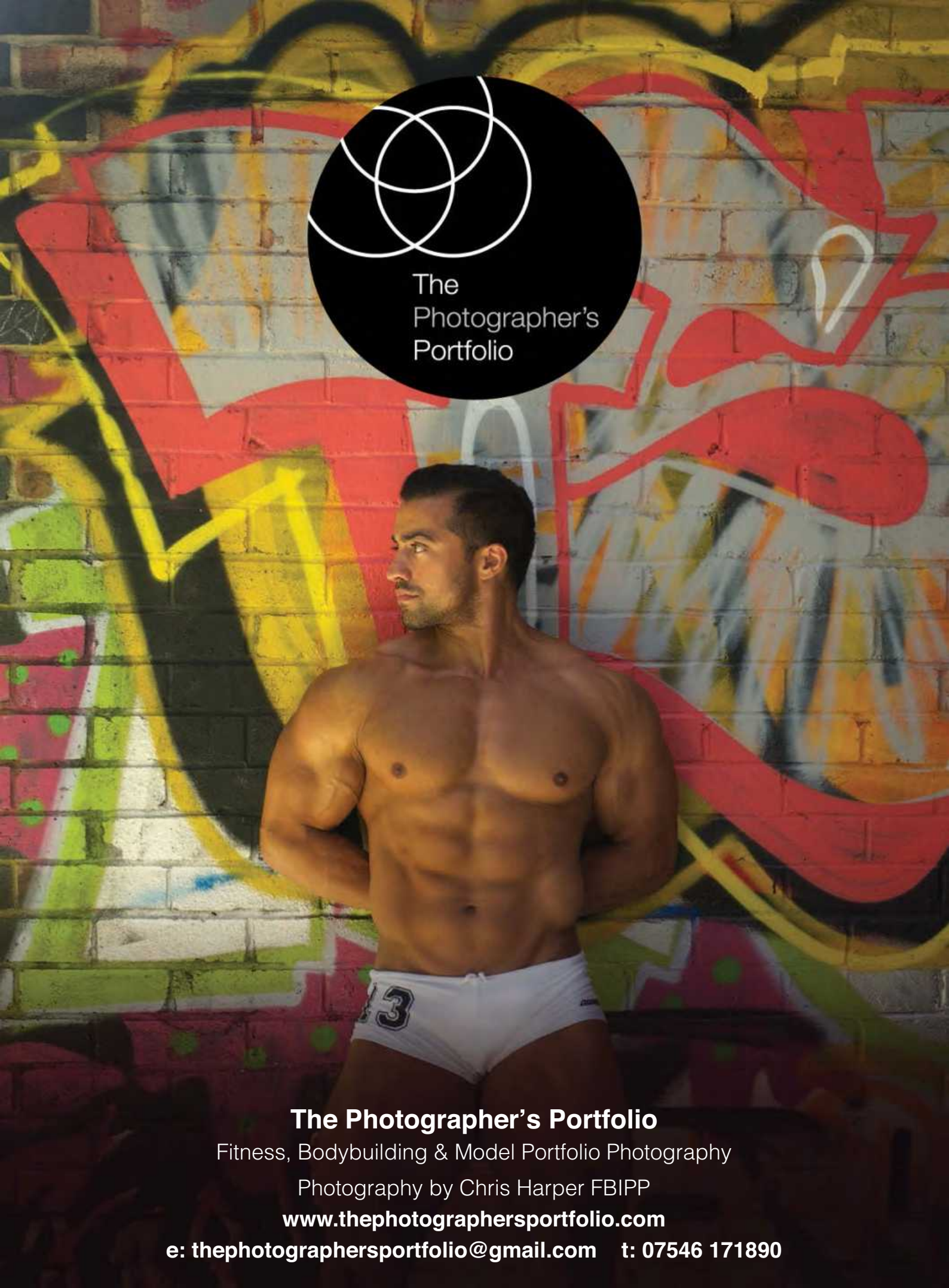
And the Angels too? That first time we saw them, we all started clapping as they look fantastic. They're almost 7ft tall in the heels and they look like complete divas with the shades. They look nothing short of absolutely fabulous!

Charlie and Lola clash and exchange some harsh words during the second half of the show. A difficult moment for you, we imagine? Charlie shouts such stabbing words directly at Lola about being a drag queen and her life choices, but he doesn't realise how hurtful words can be. I do think people will be thinking it's just fluff, but this moment is a great example there's a lot more here than expected.

And a strong message for the LGBT community, too? I'm Irish and when I heard marriage equality was passed, I was the proudest Irishman working in the West End. And after, then knowing I'm going into a musical with drag queens and about accepting people for who they are, I felt like I'd struck gold in teaching the world about acceptance for everyone. ■

@killiandonnelly, #londongetskinky.

KILLIAN DONNELLY
CHARLIE PRICE



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WORDS STEPHEN CONWAY

BOYZ N THE HOOD

British brand Duck & Cover is undergoing a little makeover on the verge of its 20th anniversary. Starting with the logo and branding, everything has been updated to reflect the tech-led designs the brand is known for. Sports casual and 90s throwback are on show for the new direction for Duck & Cover, mixing a laid back style with clean utilitarian lines and silhouettes. The new AW collection is broken into three chapters of inspiration – clean sports, 90s casuals and utility, all using premium fabrics. The full range offers up everyday basics like jeans and polos, with winter accessories and an underwear range as well. And it seems the best is yet to come still – the brand promises exciting new collaborations in 2016 when it proudly hits its landmark 20th year. ■

duckandcover.co.uk

[85]
Going for gold
Celebrating 60 years with a splash of gold, now there's really no excuse not to p-p-pick up a Penguin. ■

[86]
Up the river
As the autumn breeze comes in, we check out the best knits and outerwear in our waterfront style shoot. ■

[92]
Get scent!
Not one, not two, but THREE essential fragrances to keep you smelling sweet through to winter. ■

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£320, LUISAVIAROMA.COM

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MYSTERIOUS SKIN

When leather becomes mundane, it might be time to step up your skin game. Not creepy or crawly, but rich and exotic textures can rejuvenate the simplest of objects. Go for a faux if you're feeling a bit more compassionate, but those of us with a cold heart will benefit from a haute new layer of skin

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ON THE WATERFRONT

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN GRIBBEN
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MODELS AUSTIN AND DENTON AT NEVS
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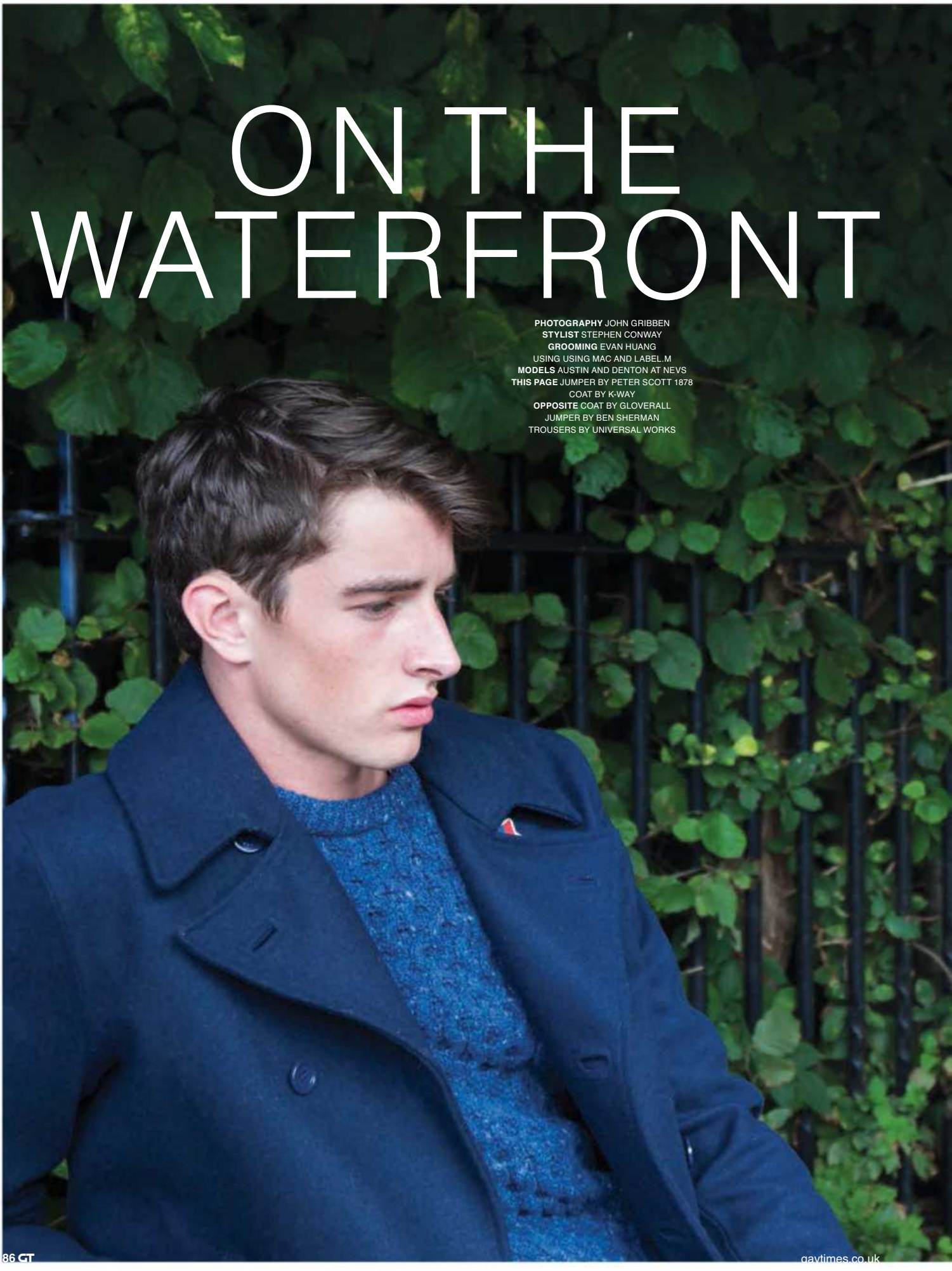

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JACKET BY BLUE COLLAR WORKER
T-SHIRT BY ALBAM
JEANS BY BLUE COLLAR WORKER
OPPOSITE
HAT BY PERCIVAL
T-SHIRT BY ABOUT
COAT BY BEN SHERMAN

THIS PAGE
FULL LOOK BY TOPMAN
OPPOSITE
JUMPER BY H&M
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Floriental

Comme des Garçons' new eau de parfum is based around a flower with no scent. How does is smell? Wonderful, of course. Oriental – hence the name – and woody, with incense and pink pepper to bring out the scent from the leaves and twig of the cistus flower.

£80, selfridges.com

The Boss man

Slow and steady seduction is the name of the game with the new Hugo Boss eau de toilette, Boss The Scent, which contains the aphrodisiac maninka fruit.

Divergent star Theo James is the face of the range, though we've yet to confirm how slow and steady his seduction is...

From £45, available nationwide

Blasted!

Not one, but two fantastic new fragrances from Penhaligon's, hot on the heels of their No 33 cologne. Blasted Heath and Blasted Bloom are eau de parfums inspired by the British landscape. Yes, that means flowers for the more feminine Bloom and musky woodlands in the rain for Heath. Like earth after a thunderstorm, stunning.

From £90, penhaligons.com

Grooming on the go

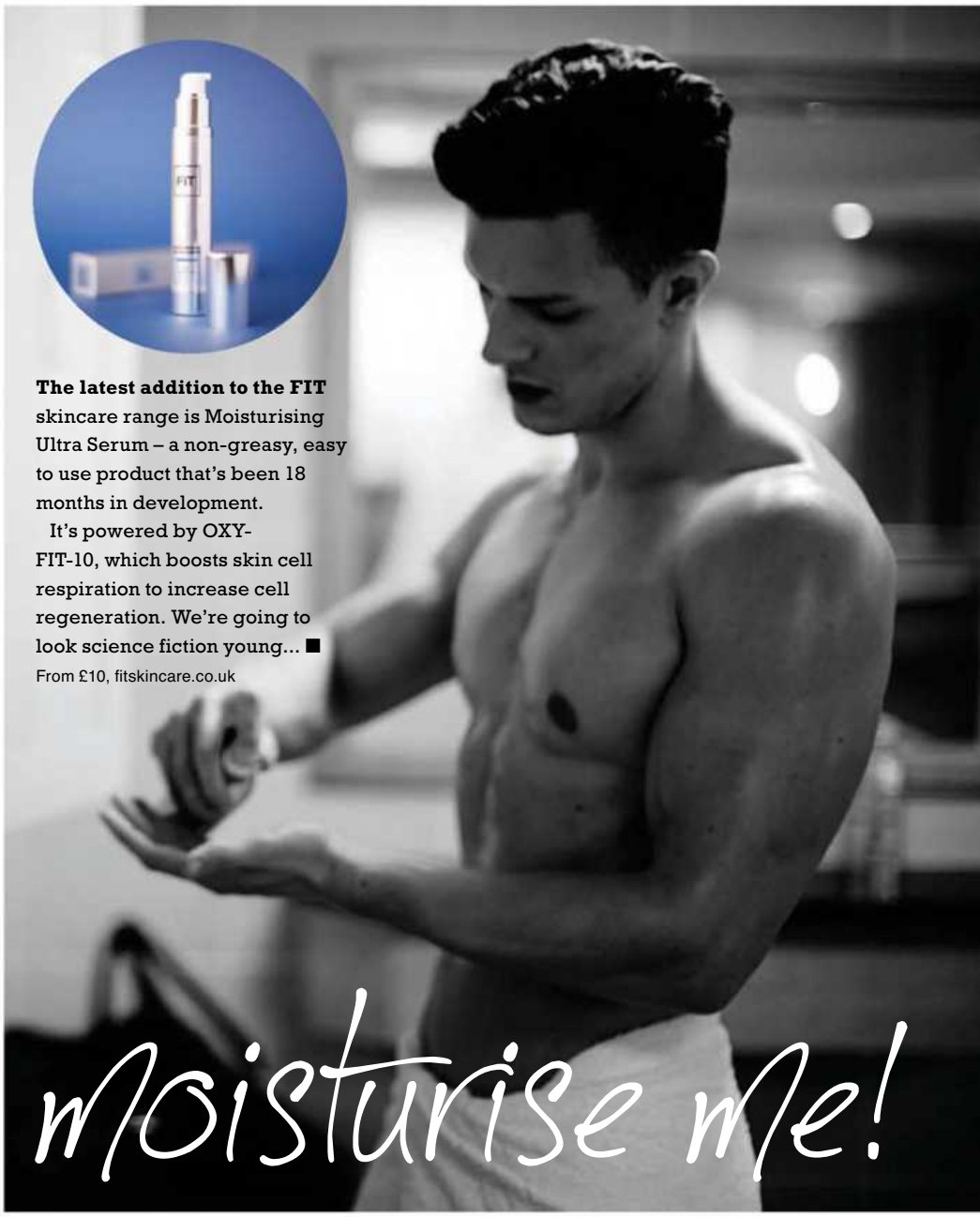
Containing two miniatures of Legend, as well as two miniatures of the new Emblem range, this Mont Blanc coffret means you can keep a pair all for yourself when on your travels. ■

Mont Blanc set, £29.50 from World Duty Free at UK airports

WORDS DARREN SCOTT

PHILIPS BODYGROOM

This little fella may not look particularly impressive size-wise, but he certainly packs a punch. And that's just as well, because he's boldly going where many men fear to fiddle. A body hair trimmer designed for 'delicate' areas, the Philips Bodygroom Series 1000 is waterproof and trims as close as 0.5mm. Philips Bodygroom Series 1000, £20, philips.com/grooming ■



The latest addition to the FIT skincare range is Moisturising Ultra Serum – a non-greasy, easy to use product that's been 18 months in development.

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moisturise me!

In your defence

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BEFORE THEY WERE LEGEND, THEY WERE LETHAL

Delve into the cruel underworld of London's East End, as the notorious Krays twins come straight to your living room. Well, on DVD that is. Yes, it's another film about brothers Ronnie and Reggie, with bloody brawls and deadly blackmails. Documenting their rise and fall, the sex, the murders and the drugs, Rise of The Krays brings the twins' infamous brutality to our small screens. And with two devilishly handsome lead actors, to boot. ■

The Rise of The Krays is available on DVD and digitally now, via Signature Entertainment.

[99]
Cheer to the Ekko
We've loved him since that Riri duet, but now Mikky is back with his new album Time. ■

[100]
The teaches of Peaches
The First Lady of Fuck is back – raw, messy and as ballsy as ever. About time, too. ■

[104]
Tom Tom
Seeing as he's playing BOTH Krays twins in the brilliant Legend, we remember why we love Tom Hardy. ■

Rudimental We the Generation A heavyweight 18 track album, stuffed to bursting point with guest appearances, proves there's no difficulty for Rudimental in making a second album. For the first quarter they come out guns blazing, with their distinctive drum and bass-lite chart sound, packed with trumpets. On Love Aint Just a Word – another top-down banger – Dizzee Rascal drops in for a drive by rap, where "he couldn't be straighter". There's no high camp to these synths, and there's something about the syncopated rhythm dominating every song that tricks your heart into beating a little faster – the tiny adrenaline shot that runs through your body before flight or fight, before dancing or downing another drink. Thankfully, the remainder of the album calms the fuck down. Anne-Marie pops up for a mid-to-up tempo number about finding yourself, Ella Eyre swings by and Lianne La Havas' second appearance allows for a little funk moment. MNEK has the understated hit of the album with Common Emotion, which will have your subwoofers purring with joy. The general theme is a celebration of love, it's blissfully free of gender references and there's only one entirely unexpected indulgent guitar solo. All good things. ■■■■■

Mercury Rev The Light In You Twee indie abounds, with an everything but the kitchen sink approach to instrumentation; angelic harp flourishes, twinkly xylophone and a lullaby-soft soothing vocal make a densely produced album. Epic but not anthemic, they fall somewhere between Stars and The Flaming Lips. ■■■■■

Julia Holter Have You In My Wilderness Julia's vocal delivery has the emotive stiltedness of Agnetha Fältskog, mixed with the give-no-fucks loucheness of Nico. Add some country swagger and Felt Mountain-era Goldfrapp waftiness, and you have the perfect post-coital indie album. ■■■■■

Nicolas Godin Contrepoint One half of French electropop pioneers AIR releases a solo album. Much like Switched-On Bach, it takes the classical composer as a starting point before taking intricate journeys into cult European pop. The ultimate in classical music nerdery and pretentious electro, and we love it. ■■■■■

Nerina Pallot The Sound and The Fury Nerina Pallot's latest album cherry picks countless genres and cultural references for a rich, alt-pop experience. From a smooth sounding PJ Harvey to elated Imogen Heap and a bit of early Marina and the Diamonds in the mix, there's plenty for femme pop connoisseurs. Highlights include If I Had A Girl, which is the theme to True Blood reimagined as a feminist hoedown, featuring great lyrics like "there ain't no dicks on page three", and the puntastic Handle being rich in Baroque orchestration, making the most of the much maligned harpsichord. ■■■■■

Metric Pagans in Vegas Like fellow Canadians Dragonette, but with a slightly rockier edge, Metric have nailed the bubblegum hook with a sneery top line, backed by glorious synth action. From the glitchy Glass Candy vocoder-laden Cascades, through to the wistful disco of Celebrate, it's aggressive electropop all the way. Lie, Lie, Lie showcases Emily Haines' silk cut smooth vocals, with some keyboard parts that sound like Gaga's Just Dance. But just before you think they're a straight up trash pop act, they take a semi-tone dive for the unexpected on Fortunes, always eschewing the obvious and going for the indie electro alternative. ■■■■■

HEY MIKKY

WORDS BOB HENDERSON

Mikky Ekko is a pop artist who isn't really that pop. The in-demand songwriter and solo artist fell into the pop factory after bursting onto the scene duetting with Rihanna on Stay, and he's barely had time to look back as he's toured his debut album Time around the world.

"I'm sort of like a spy, honestly," he tells us about working with the pop songwriting mafia. "I sneak into these sessions with the biggest producers in the world and I steal all their tricks. It's funny – inevitably you end up writing things that can be a little more accessible, if you enjoy being around people.

"Ultimately, you want it to be shared and you want that community. But I definitely don't really consider myself of the modern pop mindset."

We got a strong sense of that when we saw one of his showcase gigs at an industry event last year. By the end of his set, while singing Smile, it felt like every word was a threat.

"Sometimes you've to go into the belly of the beast to see how certain things are digested. On the other side of that, I'm able to take all that knowledge with me and apply it to other stuff that I love. And that's what's most important – that I'm willing to grow and improve."

What we love about Mikky's debut album is that it's full blown, epic, and somehow both bitterly pessimistic and uplifting at the same time.

"The album was initially a pretty pessimistic album – maybe not even pessimistic as it was introverted and heavy. As if I was going to therapy and never talking about anything good that's happening."

That is, surely, what therapy's for.

"It is, but I realised there's this entire world I have that I'm not showing people, with songs like U or Love You Crazy, where I can enjoy myself and not have to take myself so seriously. I felt like it was really important that I put songs like that on there to ease the tension a little bit."

The guy is prolific – he wrote 250 songs for Time, dividing them up between his solo songwriting material and collaborations – with the likes of Giorgio Moroder and David Guetta. And of course, that Rihanna hit, which forced him into the pop realm.

"There'd been the success with Rihanna and I've just fought that because I had no desire to be a popstar," he says. "I make music because that's what's in me and that's what comes out, and my goal with this record was to not be afraid, to let it be diverse, to let it be honest, to give people who I am as a real person – but also as an artist."

Teaming up with RiRi and having a pretty pleasant face to look at has upped his gay fan base, as you might imagine. Mikky has sort of noticed.

"I think I've got the kind of voice that's soothing for both sides when I get intimate. Gays like it, straights like it, that's just how it goes. But that song [Stay] really connected with people who've been through a lot of heartache, and I suppose I did notice there were more gays – but I wasn't sure if there was a reason the gay community was connecting with it, or because there was a lot of gay Rihanna fans."

It's a bit of both to be fair. There are definitely are a lot of gay Rihanna fans, which says more about Rihanna than anything. Mikky laughs.

"There are a lot of people on tour and when I play Stay, its been really fun. For the people who didn't know I sang it and the people who do, it's just a great return to where some people connected with me." ■

Time is released in the UK on 4 September, mikkyekko.com, @mikkyekko

Peaches is a sexual anarchist. She's fucked the pain away, set it off, shook her dix, she wants two guys for every girl, doesn't give a damn about her reputation and she's kicked it with Iggy Pop – and Pink, Christina Aguilera, Le Tigre, Major Lazer... Delve into her extensive back catalogue and you'll find songs about threesomes, hanky codes and getting it on, repeatedly. So obviously, with her return-to-her-roots fifth album Rub, we want a catch up. She reclines on a leather sofa, decked out in neon pink pop socks and a black vest adorned with Hebrew script, so we ask her what it means

WORDS BOB HENDERSON IMAGE DARIA MARCHIK

"I actually don't know but I do have 'who's jizz is this?' on my shirt," she laughs, before we launch into a mini rant about language and the topic du jour, gender.

"I don't even get why any language has the gender thing. I remember when I first moved to Germany, I decided that I was only going to learn everything with female pronouns. But then nobody really understood me..." Things are a bit clearer with Rub, which is – in her own words – postgender.

"Yeah, I mean, it's postgender, postage. 'Cos when I set out to do..," she laughs and says "what I do" in a weary, self-aware way, "my goals were first to make people dance and make people enjoy music in a way that was minimal and direct. I hoped that it seeped in, that they were listening to what I was saying and going, 'Yeah I can get behind this!' I envisioned a world that I would want, and it's becoming closer and closer to it."

PEACHES

She's right. Who would've thought the cover image of Peaches' 2003 album Fatherfucker – where she sports a fetching beard and bathing suit – would find a mirror image in mainstream Eurovision star Conchita Wurst?

"So I decided this album I'm not struggling," says Peaches, "it's not a controversial album, it's a celebration."

Controversy has always been an easy bedfellow for Peaches, just by virtue of her incredible and confrontational live shows. We'll never forget an early 2000s Manchester show where she performed unannounced and spat fake blood in our face.

"I think that it's become even more important now, with such a digital experience that everyone is having," she says. "I've always been a champion of being there. That's why I feel like I'm a performance artist, because I want to be direct with you and right there. I feel the celebration, I feel the anxiety, I feel the elation, I feel the repression."

Peaches recorded Rub with Vice Cooler, the coolest queer you've probably never heard of. From an Alabama broken home, he saw Peaches as a 16-year-old and started putting bands on in his basement, before hitting the road and befriending the likes of Deerhoof, Fugazi, Sonic Youth... and the head peach.

"I took him on tour many times, 'cos I have this insane energy, too. We talked so much about music and production and what we like aesthetically. I bought a little house in LA and it had a garage, and we just worked there every day – ten hours a day, from scratch, nothing. For a year. And it was great, 'cos there's no sexual tension and there's no ulterior motive. It was like, 'Let's get this done'. We were a little shell shocked after, we were a little bit, 'What just happened to us?!'"

What happened was Peaches return to the grubby, raw, messy self of her first two albums.

"I agree this album is back to basics, raw, fuck you." And it's a fun fuck you, that you can fuck to. "It's actually very well produced, but the rawness hasn't been taken out. We had it mixed by an insanely expert mixer, but we were like, 'No, we wanna make it more raw, we wanna make it tougher.' 'Cos if you can make things slicker, you can manipulate sounds."

There's one moment on Rub where things take a more literal fuck you, on Free Drink Ticket. There's a real malice, the kind of song Peaches hasn't written before. It happened with Planningtorock and taps into the raw feelings of a break up – but equally applies to bitchy club culture.

"We were in the studio together and I was like, 'Could you leave the room for a minute?' And it just came over me and was like 'waaargh!' And in Planningtorock style, we pitched the voice down and then we were listening to it and grabbing each other and fearing for our lives. Who is this person?!" When Peaches isn't scaring herself shitless, she's making the sexually charged, minimal punk electro she made her name with. Lead single Light in Places is a fantastic example, one of the poppier moments – and complete with a laser-shooting light-up dildo in the video.

"With that video it's so funny, all the comments they were just great," she says. "Somebody wrote the best comment, 'Power bottoms be like...' I was like, 'That's it!'" In a culture of bottom shaming, it's great to hear someone talk so openly about anal pleasure. Especially for guys, who have an anatomic advantage.

"I can't tell you how many times I've been with a 'straight' guy and you go near his buttocks and he's just... Totally shocked. And there's always an, 'Oh, uh, what?!' And then it goes either way. But it always feels like it's free game to go to a woman, which doesn't make any sense. As I've explained in Back It Up, Boys – there's actually a physiology that makes it more pleasurable and intense for a man." She laughs, and we regale her with some personal tales that confirm her point.

And as we get ready to leave Peaches on the couch, we get a bit nostalgic about electroclash, the movement that barely was, that got mercilessly derided but still managed to enlighten a whole generation of 'gays of a certain age'.

"I actually read a really good article on electroclash recently, why it only survived so briefly, and how because it was about bringing back the celebration of gender and culture, and nobody was ready to handle it yet. Then it went into nu rave, where it went all fashion and more straight. Electroclash was the first queer movement that'd happened in a while after riot grrrl. But then it influenced everything that came afterwards, so fuck all y'all." ■

Peaches album Rub is out 25 September, peachesrocks.com, @peaches

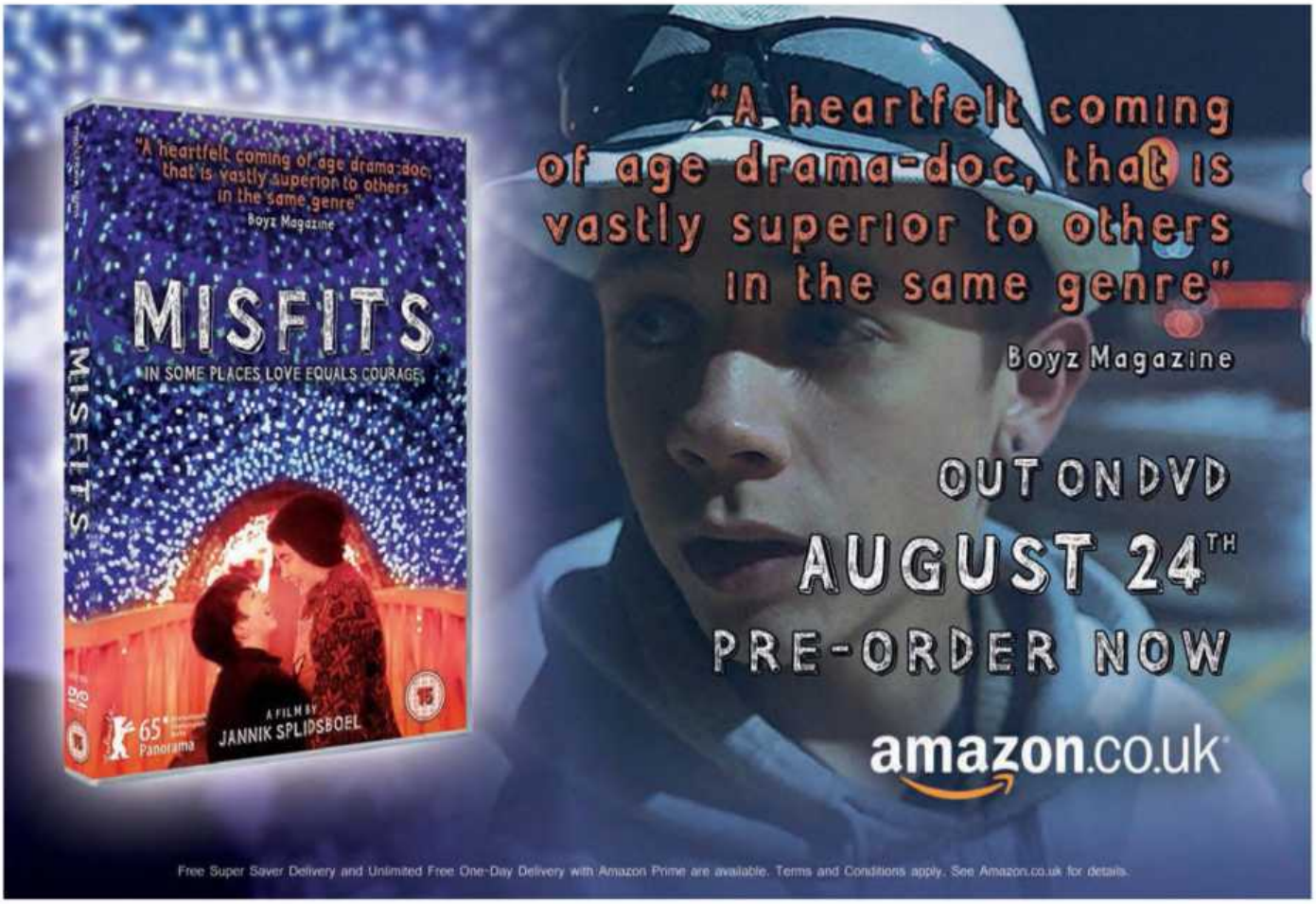
Mykki Blanco Queer as anything, sometime dragged-up rapper Mykki Blanco is branching out into a record label mogul. Less Simon Cowell and more of revolutionary collective leader, he's founded Dogfood Music Group, who're releasing their first hardcore compilation C-ORE. It features Blanco himself with his mates PsychoEgyptian, Violence and Yves Tumour, and it's a rebirthing of punk – the sneers, the attitude – as fed through some fuck off bass synth, going from minimal to maximal in a matter of minutes. This industrial sounding backdrop serves some viscous scathing raps, as Blanco spits: "They don't want to see a man in a dress succeed." The whole album is nightmarishly dark and is just one element of their planned site-specific installations, nonlinear narratives and live experiences that'll tour in autumn and sounds like a hot mess. Tracks like Histronic I and Histronic II are challenging noise for the hardest of avant garde listeners, and elsewhere the deep pitched voices and ominous synths parts sound like they could appear on a horror film soundtrack. It's a tough listen, but one that'll probably all make sense by the live performance. ■

C-ORE is out 18 September on Dogfood Music Group / K7!, mykkiblancoworld.com, @mykkiblanco

[playlist]

NERVO ft Kylie, Jake Shears & Nile Rodgers The Other Boys Insanely funky disco track, somewhere between early Scissors, Light Years and um, Infernal. It's obviously brilliant. ■ **Galantis Peanut Butter Jelly** It's been written with Dragonette and is therefore pop gold before even getting to the rave horn. It's cut up disco and pop house, and it's going to follow you home before moving into your record collection uninvited. ■ **Tove Styrke ...Baby One More Time** A timely modern rework of the Britney classic, with mellow bass grooves and only those iconic piano chords left intact. So Swedish, so chic. ■ **Martin Solveig & GTA Intoxicated** Cowbells! Trombones! Martin Solveig wanting to dance! No time for romance! Even though it's dangerously close to Alex Gaudino's Destination Unknown, it's still bang on trend. ■ **Hurts Rolling Stone** Putting the pop into pompous, this is a hilariously dramatic song. Not many sections of the orchestra are left twiddling their thumbs throughout this emotionally draining three minutes and 40 seconds. ■ **Natalie La Rose Around The World** We had to double check that this didn't open with a sample of The Fugees' Ready or Not, but once you're past that, you're into budget Rihanna territory. And we all need a cut price Riri, right? The chorus might also be code for anal. ■ **Disclosure ft Sam Smith Omen** Back in each other's arms, the breakthrough collaborators 'drop' a club and radio friendly soulful dance number. The video sees Sam in a hot sweaty club, dripping while everyone who's been kicked out of Camden gets some natty tattoos. This is the soundtrack to it. ■

The epic indie band who can do no wrong, Arcade Fire, are releasing a film. Directed by Kahlil Joseph, he's captured the behind the scenes recording process of their number one album Reflektor, reimagined some visuals for the album, and thrown in a few live shots from their London and LA shows. Expect all those papier-mâchéd heads, mirror shard moments and a few intimate chats with Win and Régine. There's even a brand new unreleased track for the die hards, for what's essentially a documentary but cut through with all the arty farty touches you'd expect from those Canadians. Arcade Fire have also made a video for the song Porno, which acts like a little taster for the whole film. The Reflektor Tapes is out on 24 September, thereflektortapes.com ■



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cinema/stream/disc

[the list] **This issue's all about sport, so it's fair/only-mildly-crowbarred that we focus our listicle stare upon cinema's most awkward of genres – the sports movie – and its sexiest offerings to date.**

[01] Southpaw Jake Gyllenhaal goes 'full-Rocky' for this punchy boxing drama, and – face-bludgeoned bloodiness aside – the shirtless results are never less than pants-droppingly arousing.

[02] A League Of Their Own No, we're not talking about Tom Hanks or James Corden, rather its collection of sassy baseball starlets including Madonna and Geena Davis.

[03] Field of Dreams DON'T JUDGE US, but Kevin Costner's never been sexier than this tale of a phwoarsome farmer on a mission from ghosts to build a baseball field. Yes, really.

[04] Friday Night Lights Take your pick from the TV show or the movie. Either way, they've got a roster of burly, bulky walking Ken dolls getting all sweaty and angsty.

[05] Jerry Maguire A wonderful reminder of a time when Tom Cruise was more movie star than Scientology LOL-target, his cocky emotional ineptitude really did 'have us at hello'.

why we love tom hardy

Firstly, just look at him. Put all that brain-boggling beauty aside for a second though, and our love for Tom Hardy goes far beyond our basic bodily urges. For one thing, he's one of the UK's nimblest of actors, balancing roles in intriguing, indie projects (Locke, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, this month's brilliant Legend) with some of the smartest blockbusters of recent years (The Dark Knight Rises, Inception, Mad Max: Fury Road). But most woo-ingly, it's rare to find a modern male celebrity so unashamed of expressing his emotions. Whether he's crying on the sofa with a bulldog in 2009's surprisingly arousing Kleenex advert, cuddling the pitbull puppy he eventually adopted on the set of The Drop, proclaiming his love for his mum, or casually revealing that he's "had sexual relations with men", Hardy is refreshingly, heart-swelling in every single way. ■

Pitch Perfect 2 Blu-Ray/DVD The Barden Bellas return followed all the sequel rules. A bigger story (competing for the World Championships), a bigger production (more dance moves!), and a bigger role for the original's even bigger breakout character Fat Amy, makes Pitch Perfect 2 as fan-pleasing as they come. Sure, it also suffers from useless side-plots and repeat jokes, but they really don't come more indulgently fun than this. ■■■■■

The Walking Dead – Season 5 Blu-Ray/DVD Until recently, The Walking Dead regularly suffered from shuffling, unpredictable, zombie-like pacing issues. With season five however, it had more than enough plot ammo to sustain the long haul, boasting cannibals, big character deaths, Carol going full bad-ass, some major character development for leading man Rick, and a shocking cliffhanger that has fans breathless for season six. Boring Beth side plot aside, it was the best season yet. ■■■■■

Arrow – Season 3 DVD Marvel may rule the comic book cinematic universes, but when it comes to caped crusades on the gogglebox, DC really are the ones to beat. Arrow's third season capitalised on its success and proven formula to date, but ultimately suffered from a lack of direction and a punchable Big Bad that took far too long to emerge. Still, when Ra's al Ghul did appear, things kicked into gear, with Ollie's 'death' and return offering fan-pleasing plot twists galore. ■■■■■

The Flash – Season 1 DVD The Flash sped onto screens with a grin on its face and a skip in its Hermes-heeled step. Ironically enough, the story of Barry Allen, a crime scene investigator imbued with the power of super-speed by a chemistry lab disaster, took its time finding its groove. Stick with it past the campy beginnings though, and DC's Scarlet Speedster settles into an electrifying rhythm, with a stellar Rogues list, Easter Eggs and Arrow crossovers guaranteeing this is one that'll run and run. ■■■■■

WORDS MATT RISLEY

Legend Cinema
Not that we're really into the whole twin porn thing – seriously guys, that's incest any way you look at it – we're not going to deny we got more than a little giddy at the thought of Legend, a gangster flick that has Tom Hardy playing two parts at once. The arouse-o-meter dimmed somewhat upon the news that he was going to be portraying the Kray twins, two of the most terrifying gangsters in history.

The result is as BAFTA-baitingly great as you'd imagine; a stylishly period crime drama that weaves through the glitzy, celebrity-laden highs of their rise to power, and the unsettling, gruesome lows of the underworld crimes needed to get them there. While it's a tale anchored by the narration of Reggie's troubled, fragile wife Frances (Emily Browning), and bolstered by a darkly comedic through-current that helps offset the simmering violence, it's unsurprisingly Hardy's disparate, nuanced performances that dazzle – even if Ron's psychosis does occasionally slip into Little Britain Lou levels of off-putting campness.

As captivating and illuminating as it is ultimately upsetting, it's a fitting testament to the devastating consequences of their twisted actions. ■■■■■

Dope Another Sundance darling, Dope is a dazzlingly unique coming of age tale, following three geeky teens obsessed with 90s hip-hop and their mission to escape their downtrodden neighbourhood 'The Bottoms' (heh). An ace soundtrack, smart script, electrifying performances and a perfect blend of crime, comedy and drama. ■■■■■

The D Train James Marsden and Jack Black team-up for a comedy following a desperate attempt to drag a school's most successful, Z-list celebrity student back to his high school reunion. Unable to straddle the tonal balance between melancholic drama with goofy comedy, it's ultimately as amusing as it is forgettable. ■■■■■

Straight Outta Compton The story of arguably the greatest hip-hop group in history is rife for the cinematic telling, stuffed with conflicts both external and internal, against-the-odds challenges and an utterly perfect music library to work from. The result is less cliched than you'd expect, and as big as the personalities its based on. ■■■■■

Fantastic Four Cinema Fantastic Four only really had one aim – to be better than the 00s naff cheese-fests. Yet, while it certainly improves upon aspects of those camp adventures, it's frustratingly hard to argue it succeeds. More grounded and eye-rollingly gritty, Josh Trank's reboot boasts great casting and some twisted body horror, but it's laden with a dull script and super-powered pacing issues. It may be an admirable bed-'rock' for a sequel, but 'transparent' on character and lacking in SFX 'fire'-works, it's an already familiar origin 'stretched' far too thin. ■■■■■

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl Cinema The Sundance Film Festival has a stellar track record when it comes to debuting the most unique new movies of the year. So it's no surprise to see that the winner of two awards at this year's fest is far smarter and emotive than its tween-gushing synopsis would suggest. Awkward teen Greg is forced to befriend his leukaemia-stricken fellow student Rachel. Greg's BFF Earl completes the gang, and they make cutesy sweded trailers for their favourite films together. Imbued with the sharpest of black humour, some grin-inducing creativity and smart, honest feels, this is a brilliant coming of age tale. ■■■■■

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IT'S NOT ADAMANTIUM AND EVE ANYMORE

Forget the blockbuster cinematic experience and delete those bad Shia LaBeouf memories. This month we're talking about Transformers with a twist. Robots, still in disguise, but out of the closet.

Yeah, they've come a long way in 30 years. The current IDW comic series More than Meets the Eye shatters the glass ceiling of same-sex representation, introducing characters with gender and sexual identity issues in a society divided by class apartheid. From among the ranks of all your old favourites: Optimus Prime; Bumblebee; Tracks, in that rainbow of well known, splashy colours and vibrant personalities, all peppered with their own hard-earned PTSD.

Stepping out of the robosexual closet, Autobots Chromedome and Rewind took their relationship up a gear with a declaration of love in #16. While there are always fans who delight in interpreting characters in a homoerotic light – personally we prefer ours in the form of muscular Spider-Men straining their skintight spandex – this is established cannon.

Though it doesn't mean we'll see them performing a technological Karma Sutra...

From its inception, Transformers existed to sell toys to kids, so it's no surprise there's been, until now, a lack of in cannon same-sex romance. The brand has always been in line with the youth demographic, but those Generation One kids grew up, and IDW manages to tap into that older Autobot-loving audience. More than Meets the Eye has, at the very least, thoughtfully acknowledged the LGBT community. Series writer James Roberts explains that the response from readers has been almost overwhelmingly positive.

Reasons to love: Robot marriage. Robots on life support. Gay married robots on life support in space. Sad robots in space. Fun, bright and heartbreaking. ■

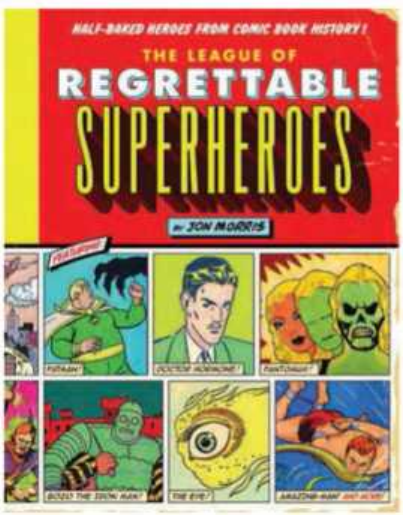
The MOTHER of all action figures The ultimate anti-technology honey badger, T2 Sarah Connor, is by far the best-case scenario of your mum being a survivalist nut. Strong. Damaged. Armed. But it was the 90s, so that was the norm. The definitive collectors figure comes with shotgun, pistol, knife and interchangeable ponytail head. ■

A really messed up Polly Pocket The Xenomorph family are very tactile. Chest bursting. Face hugging. Bishop impaling. Celebrating 35 years of inaudible space screams, these licensed Minimates sets face off the iconic alien stomping Caterpillar Power Loader P-5000, against HRH the Xeno-Queen. ■

Touch-a, touch-a, touch him Give yourself over to absolute pleasure. Swim the warm waters of sins of the flesh. Erotic nightmares beyond any measure, and sensual daydreams to treasure forever. Can't you just see it? Don't dream it, be it. Really, he's just a sweet Pop! Vinyl transvestite from Transexual, Transylvania. ■

With Regrets

Capes, cowls, spandex and super powers sounds like a winning combo to any fan of mainstream superhero comics, but in his brilliant new book, The League of Regrettable Superheroes, author Jon Morris offers a rundown of 100 of the strangest flights and tights types, to ever see print. His colourful commentary on some on the industries D-List talent is hilarious, factual, and affectionate. For every Spider-Man, Wolverine and Dazzler who made it, there's a score of fantastic, ill-considered train wrecks and could-have-beens. Packed with vintage art, backstories and highlights on characters like Bee Man – you know, Batman, but with BEES... ■



[apps]

iTunes U
In the couple of months when Apple has reasserted its claim to the thrown, it sticks in the craw a little that iTunes U is absolute genius; collecting info from other sources – including other apps, books and journals – iTunesU also has 10,000-plus other public courses on its, er, books ■

MyStudyLife
You're no one without a schedule these days, and MyStudyLife understands that better than most. Plug all your study info – assignment deadlines, lectures, tutorials – into this little app and… Still blame someone else when you drink through them. ■

Mad Max
Game of the Month

The villain is called Scrotus. And you get to be – to all intents and purposes – Tom Hardy in this delicious accompaniment to what's become the hit of the summer, if only in terms of defying realistic expectations. The Road Warrior – here exploiting all the meat next-gen gaming has to offer, must race across the familiarly orange-hued landscape with only stolen power for, well, power, fighting every inch of the way for whatever it takes to upgrade his ride – whether through full-blooded, explosive races or by breaking necks on foot. The scale of the carnage makes Mad Max a powerful relation to its celluloid sister, even if that sisterhood ends before the inclusion of equally powerful female roles beyond guest spots. But the game's physics pack a punch and the race sections deserve perseverance, even if the best bit about the on-foot sections are standing still to rotate the camera and look at Tom Hardy. ■ PS4, Xbox One – 4 September

FIFA 16 It's with a feminist bent that we're thrilled to report that 12 women's international football teams will appear in FIFA 16 – the first time there's been even a hint of vagina anywhere near the all-conquering football series. This is literally the case, if any representation of video-gaming on TV has been even slightly true. FIFA 16 stops short of allowing mixed gender teams and it won't let you play male versus female teams, apart from in some designated situations. Presumably those where men and women have proved friendship is possible without sexual jealousy? Still – a major video game series has acknowledged that there are two sexes and multiple roles within those definitions so, you know, woo! Can't wait to play as a girl in Assassin's Creed, Ubisoft… ■
All formats – 22 September

PES 2016 What we said above but, well, without the girls. ■
All formats – 18 September

WORDS MIKE HIRD

COOL FOR SCHOOL

September, and thoughts are turning to school. Well, for those of us young enough – or mid-life crisis-y enough… Worry not! Whether you're embarking into higher learning for the first time or just need some cool gadgets to distract the kids from the fact you're more salt than pepper, we're on hand with sound advice

01

Project your personality True, they did the same thing with a pizza box recently, but this little gimmick, the Vktech DIY Cardboard Smartphone Projector, won't smell of pepperoni and has the added virtue of slots for speakers and chargers. amazon.co.uk/vktech, from £17.35 ■

02

Or… Just write it down You're a student. No, you're a modern student. But you still need to write it down. And learn it. But you CAN do it in style and with tech – the Jot Touch gives you what you need to really make your iPad a notebook without involving your fingers… adonit.net, from £49.99 ■

03

Distract with tricks of the light The PlayBulb has already transformed your living room into an ambient hub, but, well, you've moved into student digs and the Juliet balcony you call outside space is crying out for just a bit of that ambience. Enter the PlayBulb Garden. playbulb.com, from £39.99 ■

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Martin
Swindon, 46, masseur

I love being naked! As a gay masseur, I often see guys that are unhappy with their naked bodies, and it always makes me sad that society has made them feel that way. Having said that, it's only since age 31 that I've started to feel comfortable with my own body. I came out at 31 and a lot of things changed for me. I started to get a lot of attention from guys and this helped build my confidence! I'm happy with my body and I'd be attracted to someone else with a similar one – but I wouldn't check myself out! It just happens to be what I like… Normal build guys. I don't like muscle or over-worked six packs. I do like my bum, though. My hairy back is the area I have issues with. I try to get it waxed as often as I can. Eyes and smile are what draws me in when meeting someone. When it comes to purely admiring male bodies in images, then it's a really nice bum that attracts me. Personality's always the main factor when looking for a guy for friends or a relationship, though. Friendly, bubbly and outgoing… A nice body's just a bonus. ■

[119]
Priorities please
Why Michael Alig just can't stay focused on one thing long enough to actually do it properly... ■

[120]
It's not you, it's them
"My man hates my mates and has none of his own." The Guyliner takes on your dilemmas. ■

[123]
Something for everyone
Positive Luke wonders if we still need gay bars, shops and saunas now that we have apps... ■

There are at least 100 Muslim drag queens living in the UK, but almost all of them keep their religion a secret. Not Asifa Lahore, the first queen to announce her arrival to her community and her family

WORDS THOMAS LING **IMAGES** PHIL FISK / CHANNEL 4 TELEVISION

I'D HAD MY SHARE OF PRE-performance jitters before, but this was really something I had to worry about. All I could do was check my outfit, wait for the cue, and introduce myself to the eager crowd. But as I strode on stage there was no applause, no cheering – only a chorus of gasps that were eventually drowned out by somebody spitting a drink. It was almost as if they'd never seen a drag act wearing a traditional burqa and heels before. I smiled. Asifa Lahore had arrived.

It was a moment decades in the making. As a child, at least once a year a Pakistani relative got married, and I always watched in awe as my mum tried on her gorgeous wedding saris and perfected her make-up. All I wanted was to have a ceremony just for me, but even then I knew a traditional Muslim wedding wasn't possible. I knew I wanted to marry a boy.

This wasn't ideal. I lived in a conservative Muslim environment, a community that was inherently homophobic. I spent my childhood terrified I'd get found out. I kept my head down and made sure I spent a lot of time with my female cousins, just in case any of the boys sniffed me out.

But there was one place I couldn't hide. It wasn't long into secondary school when the homophobic bullying started, particularly from my Muslim classmates, and it only grew more serious as the years went on. One day, there was a rumour I'd be stabbed at the end of the school day. The teachers knew what was going on, but did nothing. Instead of speaking to my parents or searching for a knife, they kept me behind for a couple of hours after the last lesson and one of them dropped me off a few roads from my house. It was how it needed to happen. If I wanted to keep my family close then I had to keep them in the dark.

I was 16 and my sister was ten

[REAL LIFE]

when she found out I was gay. I came into my bedroom and she was standing there, staring at my diary open in her hand. 'Mum and dad won't understand,' she said without looking up. 'You just can't tell them.' So I didn't. It was surprisingly easy. As British Muslims, we naturally grew up without telling our parents every part of our life and lying about what we got up to in the real world. I was lonely, but it was just simpler to not tell them.

Then things got complicated. I discovered the London gay scene. I found people in my exact position, people who understood what it was like to lie to their families. But over time, there was this pressure to leave my Muslim community – my family – behind if I wanted to be part of the 'gaysian' lifestyle. It seemed like the only way forward was to denounce my religion when I went out clubbing and then come home to deny my sexuality to my family – and myself. I couldn't keep on doing that. It was time to come out.

I was 23 and at university when I was ready to tell my parents. At that point, I'd met enough gay people to know it was normal, but that didn't make it any easier for mum and dad. Being LGBT was an alien concept for my parents and it was a challenge to explain to them in Urdu, a language where the word 'gay' simply doesn't exist.

They were in shock. Absolute shock. My mum started crying, my dad joined in and then I teared up in pure Bollywood drama style. My father just couldn't understand. 'Was there anything that I did… Anything that turned you this way? Did I not spend enough time with you? How are we going to hold up our heads in the community?'

So he whisked me off to the family doctor. My father had trusted him for years to cure any illness of the family, but this time he was told there was no prescription that would turn me heterosexual – I was just born this way. My father never said, but I could tell he was ashamed of me.

Those were lonely times. People in my mosque knew about me, but they were too scared to talk about it. There were no Muslim LGBT role models in the media, no stars I could relate to.

I wasn't trying to be famous when I entered Drag Idol in 2011. I just saw the poster and thought it would be a laugh. And it was. Only a few weeks later, I'd be standing on that quiet stage stripping off my burqa to reveal the miniskirt below and listening to the hundreds of nervous laughs from the audience. I was finally out of the shadows and stirring up debate. I was finally safe. I came third in the contest, invested in a few wigs and a rainbow coloured burqa, and my new life took off.

When I read my first death threat, it was like time had stopped. I thought about killing myself, but I couldn't do it

When I go out clubbing, I go as Asifa – a fishy and outspoken party animal who gets attention from lots of guys – completely different to when I'm watching daytime TV as Asif. As Asifa, I get marriage proposals from Muslim men who think I'm a trans woman, and I politely have to explain my delicate tucking procedure. They normally walk off, but come back two minutes later and tell me that's fine; they still want me as a wife.

The best part of being Asifa? My mum. She's so supportive of me and has even been to a few of my shows. She tries to look out for me, always nagging – 'Make sure you cover up! Never go out bare legged!' I guess my mother's blessing is worth slipping on some tights if I know she's in the audience.

My father has never joined her

and it's still something we've never spoken about, but we still spend Sunday afternoons chatting about his favourite topic – serious Pakistani politics. It might not sound like a lot, but it's worth a lot, considering some of our extended family no longer speak to us. They don't agree with me and I haven't visited Pakistan since I started drag.

People can do a lot worse than ignore me. When I read my first death threat, it was like time had stopped. I stared at the computer screen and I was scared. Really scared. I soon received more messages from Muslims saying I should give up my religion. I thought about killing myself. I couldn't do it, but then I figured somebody would soon take my life for me. 'Let me just not go on,' I thought. 'Let me just stay quiet for the sake of my family.'

After two days, I came to my senses. Of course I could be Muslim and gay – anybody can. There's no call for the persecution of the LGBT community in the Quran. As Asifa, I have to tell people this, and nobody should take my voice away. Granted, I'd never pray in drag – the hair and makeup would ruin my prayer mat – but I can be a strong role model for Muslims everywhere. I have a responsibility. The entire LGBT community does.

Yes, I still have days where I don't want to get out of bed, days where I think they might be my last, but my parents will always make me happy. I know I'll keep taking the next step with my family walking beside me. ■

Asifa also featured in the Channel 4 documentary Muslim Drag Queens, available to watch online at channel4.com, @asifalahore

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IMAGE MJC PHOTOGRAPHY

Recently, I've been getting a lot of letters and messages from gay people who feel they're unable to come out of the closet because of the way they were brought up. Some even stating how much they hated themselves and have tried to end their lives because they couldn't change their feelings.

As the years pass on since I ran away from home, I can't help but look back and think of what I miss. I miss my crazy family and the close-knit community… But although that community of gypsies was amazingly close, the traditions and rules they hang on to, even today, seriously suck arse.

Hence why I was left with a choice, either to run away and live as a gay man, or stay behind and get the living shit kicked out of me every day for being gay. I could've tried to hide it, but despite what you want to believe… People KNOW. There's more to being gay than just being attracted to the same sex. There's a quality and an aura that comes with it, that's undeniable; no matter how 'butch' you try to be. If you're a gay person, who's right now living among your community, town, family, culture, or whatever, I bet, despite no matter how stoic you try to be, the rumours of your sexuality are rife, and constantly needing to be quashed, or denied, and it's exhausting!

If you think you can live the rest of your life pretending that you're straight, and are willing to live out a lonely, tormented and ridiculed life full of rumour and gossip, even to the point of marrying some poor cow who you'll never be attracted to, just to please your family, then you're very brave… Actually, strike that, I feel terrible for you, you're being foolish! And you MUST take some serious action towards changing it. Now.

No matter how much you hear about it, and how many idiots tell you it can be suppressed, there's NO WAY you can make believe, or deny, or pray the gay away. And your life will be truly awful until you admit to yourself that you can't change what's in your bones and start to make changes for what's best for you, and the people who love you, who'll have trouble dealing with it.

Your life will be truly awful until you admit to yourself that you can't change what's in your bones and start making changes for what's best for you

Sounds like a gypsy curse, doesn't it? Well sadly, it isn't.

This is not me forcing you to go into the lounge and announce you're gay to your family, because believe me, I know that some people are fucking lucky to feel that they're able to do that, because a massive amount of us would be more likely to get publicly flogged during that very moment.

My family always knew I was gay. I never told them. They just knew. I wasn't a feminine child. I was being brought up to be a great fighter from as early as I remember, and I'd be punched to bits for even picking up one of my sisters' toys… And that A La Carte Kitchenette of hers was really bloody tempting, I tell you! It had a plastic roast turkey and everything.

I knew that I could never change. And I did the best thing possible for me, but also for the family I knew could never accept it.

Years later, I have contact with my family again. But can I talk about boyfriends? No. Can I even say the gay word? No. But it's more than I thought I'd get.

We can't force people to change their ways and habits. And telling the people you love that you're gay doesn't always turn out like it does in the movies. Sometimes, there's great sacrifice that comes with what we are. I left all I knew to live freely as a gay man. Some days are very hard, and all I want to do is go home to the camp and talk to my mum, and go out for a drink with my dad. But that's not an option. My culture is still ruled by old voices, and that's sometimes a very difficult pill to swallow. It isn't easy. But for now, our options are few. I'm lucky enough to have my freedom to be who I am, and I hope you can find that too. You're not alone. ■

@thatbloodymikey

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SECOND CHANCE: LIFE AFTER 17 YEARS IN PRISON [michael alig]

Your main issue is prioritisation,' my roommate, Ernie, said in the dry, sarcastic way he has when he's trying to make a point. 'You're running around all over the place, working on something new... But you never seem to actually accomplish anything.'

Prioritising has always been an issue with me, but more so since my return from 'Peru.' To me, the choices aren't always obvious. Should I schedule the removal of my paintings from the gallery that just hosted my art exhibition or spend the afternoon with the hot guy from Brooklyn who texted me a dick pic? That one's actually pretty easy. This guy had the nicest ass I've ever groped. And besides, the show's already happened! I could pick up my lousy artwork any old time!

Except, I couldn't. I'd waited until the last second and was unable to secure a car service, so Ernie was forced to drive me downtown in rush hour traffic on the day he'd taken off to celebrate his birthday. I could hear his teeth gnashing in standstill rush hour traffic as horns blared and temperatures soared on the FDR Expressway.

'Can't you turn on the air conditioning?' I sighed, a bead of sweat dripping across my smooth forehead, unwrinkled by any worry of deadline. I dropped my iPhone beneath the seat. 'Ugh!' I moaned, contorting my arm as I reached down to grab it. 'I have the worst luck! Can you imagine anything more inconvenient?!'

Chaos has always suited me. It leads often to desperation, which, along with creativity and enthusiasm, are the three ingredients that've formulated my greatest successes. The desperation that caused me to flee my home town in Indiana – a messy breakup with my first boyfriend – brought me to NYC, where my creativity and persistence led to the creation of the Club Kids, the massification of acid house, techno and electronica, and the rehabilitation of a landmarked church called Limelight. The desperation of not getting enough publicity led me to start my own magazine, Project X. It was a formula for success given to me by Annie Flanders, the original publisher of Details magazine. 'Be persistent and enthusiastic!' she gushed at an early concept meeting for Project X. 'If you are, I promise in the end you'll always win, even if only by default.' According to the Gospel of Ms Flanders, success was measured by outlasting your rivals.

Michael Alig did NOT skimp on a theme party!

And I did. While other clubs fell by the wayside, our empire thrived. In addition to Limelight, we took over the legendary Palladium, Tunnel and USA — at the time, the largest clubs in NYC.

Trouble first arrived in 1995, after launching my latest brainstorm, the Tunnel Rest Home, a club-wide themed event, part techno superclub, part home for the aged.

'Money's no object!' I proclaimed at a meeting with the crew to design my geriatric disco. I envisioned depressing, mauve-wallpapered hallways lined with cookie-cutter hospital rooms. Walkers! Bedpans! Sippy cups! I convinced my boss, Peter Gatien, to hire actual old people, who'd lie all night in hospital beds, connected to an IV. Michael Alig did NOT skimp on a theme party!

Sadly, countless nights on coke, K, and rohypnol, made it difficult to focus. I went off on tangents, never finishing anything, and in the end my Rest Home was but a shadow of its intended fabulosity: one measly, half-realised hospital room, its bed, a couple of mattresses on a wooden platform with a metal railing attached. No bedpans! No sippy cups!

I knew it was the end when a columnist panned the event. 'He didn't even hire real old people,' the column lamented. 'Just young people dressed as old people.'

No more! After 17 years I'm once again sharp, focused. A regular dynamo! No more diversions and tangents! I've got my act together now! I – What? At the beginning of this column? I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about! ■

@alig_aligula

My man hates my mates – and has none of his own

My boyfriend hates my friends and it's making life impossible for me. When we first started going out, he'd socialise with us all – I have quite a large gang of mates – and everything was fine. When we got a flat together, he began avoiding group social occasions and say he was tired or, more often, say he'd "catch up with us later" but never show. My friends noticed and think he's a weirdo. Now my man has gone as far as saying he can't stand my mates. He thinks they are too camp and loud, drink irresponsibly and act like they're "19-year-old idiots out on the scene for the first time". We're in our early thirties! VERY early! He's 39. He's not said anything like "it's them or me", but it feels that way sometimes. He doesn't have any mates of his own, just a few boring bitter queens he knows from uni who he meets for coffee every now and again. It's like the Spice Girls said, "If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends." It upsets me he won't even try, but he's either oblivious or doesn't care. What shall I do?!
Steve, by email

The Guyliner replies I wouldn't pay much attention to the Spice Girls if I were you. "Friendship never ends" – except it does, when Geri gets off the plane, trilling, "See you tomorrow girls", and then dumps the other four via a solicitor's letter, hotfooting it to solo stardom as fast as her Union Jack platforms will carry her.

In all seriousness, this isn't a great situation for either of you to be in, and it does look, on first glance, that your boyfriend is an old fart who maybe just wants you all to himself. You do say, though, that when you first started dating he was happy to tag along while you and your pals lived it up like the ageless hedonists you no doubt are. "I have quite a large gang of mates" – is this the issue? For every gregarious party animal who loves to be first on the dance floor in the tightest trousers possible, there's a meek and mild bundle of awkwardness who's not quite sure where they fit in. Maybe your boyfriend is intimated by the sheer scale of your entourage. If he thinks they're too camp then you have a whole load of other issues that need sorting there – hello internalised homophobia! – but you yourself admit he's more in tune with his own friends, "a few boring bitter queens", which doesn't paint you in the best light either. What a pair.

If your pals and your man getting along is a big deal to you, make it easier for your fella by shrinking the group slightly. Have some select, civilised dinners – I know how much 39-year-olds love those – and let him get to know your mates a few at a time, rather than chucking the whole lot at him and expecting him to slot in. And you have to get to know his bitter old queens, too. Show him how good it can be to socialise together and that your pals aren't all bad. I'm not saying change who you are, or your circle of friends, but if your love is to last, you have to involve your boyfriend. Any Spice Girl could tell you that. ■

@theguyliner

need advice?

Need some good old-fashioned advice on matters of love, life or relationships? Email me in total confidence on theguyliner@gaytimes.co.uk. I can't respond individually and your emails may be edited for use in the magazine. We won't use your real name or publish any contact details.

WORDS THE GUYLINER IMAGES ISTOCKPHOTO

ALL THE MEN YOU SHOULD NEVER DATE

[01] The Wallet Waver If, like me, you've known what it is like to have no money, or very little, you may find yourself attracted to the Wallet Waver at first. Whether he's got the dollah because he's from posho stock or got one of those top-secret jobs at a big evil global corporation, or maybe he's that alien life form who is merely "good with money", the Wallet Waver is the very worst person to have money. Forget all those supposed benefit cheats you're so paranoid about or Kanye having opulent money-burning parties in a think-piece near you, the real enemy is the man who simply can't stop going on about how much dosh he has.

He knows the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. Dinners and cocktails will also be top-end, and he never even looks at the price on the wine list.

When you say you like his suit or his watch or his haircut, he'll not tell you where he got it, but how much it cost him. He doesn't enjoy nice things for the sake of having nice things – and he's got plenty – he gets his kick seeing someone's face when he tells them just how much he paid for that set of pans he never uses to cook with, because he spends his nights falling out of Addison Lees and into the latest expensive, chi-chi restaurant.

And you, my little urchin, are his perfect audience. He'll enjoy watching your pupils dilate while he rubs you down with shower gel that cost more than the GDP of Guatemala.

And yet amid all this expense, you'll feel pretty cheap. Once the thrill of having him slide his Amex card between your arse cheeks has faded, what next? When you're in the penthouse, how can you go up?

The solution: Try your best to earn more money than him. If that's not an option, rinse that wallet for all its worth until he's left with nothing but his personality. And pray he's still got one. ■

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[02] The Stan Who's your favourite popstar? OK, cool, but do you have all their albums? Have you seen all the tours? Do you blog about them? Do you buy any magazine they're in, even if it's just a picture of them being sick down themselves in an LA 'nightspot'? And do you follow them on Twitter, waiting for them to tweet anything, absolutely anything? And when they do, do you reply "SLAY" or " I L Y MOM" or "YAAAAAAAS" or "DRAG HER MY KWEEN" or "fuck me daddy"?

You don't? Are you sure? Oh. Then you're not a proper fan. You can't be. Going out with a Stan – so-called after the super-normal fan from Eminem's song of the same name – is only ever going to be a disappointing experience.

There'll be, at the very least, depending on your man's loyalties, three of you in the relationship. Him, you and THE STAR.

No amount of adulation you'll get will compare to the starry-eyed worship of your man's favourite popstar.

And even if you don't stan for anyone in particular, eventually, when things turn sour, he'll be coming for your faves harder than he ever came for you.

The solution: SLAAAAAAAY him, queen. ■

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FEELING THE HEAT

[positive luke]

IMAGE LIAM WYCHERLEY

As minorities in society, LGBT people have long relied on exclusive venues to accommodate their needs to express sexual individuality. From what I've heard of previous decades, gay bars became a 'safe-haven' for many people who didn't wish to converse openly about their identity in an environment that more or less excluded them entirely.

Thankfully, we're now worlds apart from the self-segregation of LGBT people, and to think gay bars were the primary place for gay people to meet now seems so pre-historic in regard to the ease and accessibility of the internet – something that now seems to be replacing this vital desire for a frequent physical setting.

The question often arises: Do we still need gay bars, saunas and sex shops? Opinions on this vary massively. With apps like Grindr or Tinder now just a click away, we openly acknowledge an unprecedented period in the gay timeline, where sex has become all too easy, potentially threatening the need for any form of 'gay venue' at all.

But how easy was sex to obtain before these apps? Many would cite gay saunas as the fundamental sexual meeting-place. I often hear people question whether saunas should still exist, and the opinions surrounding them intrigue me.

'They encourage unprotected sex', 'They're all full of seedy old men', and the overly used presumption that everyone in a sauna MUST be searching for the sleaziest sex known to man. I've visited three saunas in my life, something that, once said out loud, either evokes a look of interest or of utter disgust.

My first sauna experience filled me with many of the daunting misconceptions I still often hear today, but to my delight it was rather pleasant; clean locker rooms that resembled that of a public swimming pool, steam rooms galore, and a very roomy Jacuzzi. The men varied widely in age, some being in their 60s, others were like myself, a teenager, as I was at the time.

While initially I considered the prospect of being harassed for sex or followed around a very real 'concern', I spent a lot of my time there chatting, flirting and, overall, relaxing. To say nothing went on would of course be ridiculous – given the fact I was 18, found promiscuous sex a potent thrill and that I had an overwhelming desire to experience all 'adult gay culture' had to offer me.

I often hear people question whether saunas should still exist, and the opinions intrigue me

My second sauna visit would definitely be more adventurous – a popular 24/7 sauna in Manchester following a night out on a busy bank holiday weekend welcomed me with more than I even anticipated. Unlike my first encounter, this sauna seemed to hold an abundance of men who resembled likenesses to an aftershave advert. And in the company of a close friend, a porn room with eight other men proved to be the highlight of such a night.

I recently discovered a bar in my hometown of Birmingham that resembled something of a 'sauna' and a bar. While nothing sexual occurred, I was curious to observe all that this venue had to offer towards a variety of fetishes. A bar in the main room, a water sports room to the rear, dark rooms, voyeuristic cubicles with peep holes, and even an outdoor urinal in the smoking area. I enjoyed my pint with an Australian expat and went on my way, carrying the thought that gay bars, saunas and any place suited towards a group of people that would otherwise be shunned for what they found sexual or satisfying, was still important.

I know so many who would never declare their experiences at saunas, or fetish bars – often fearing judgement. I felt somewhat proud that these places still exist. The generic gay bar holds so much a dating app can't offer; topless dancing, drag queens and a place of belonging.

Above all, wherever we chose to go: we're all looking for fun. ■

@positiveluke

James Anderson

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ADWELCONJAP 21-05-15E

"GAINS, BRAH" [pj brennan]

I've been kind of going to the gym recently. I've not quite convinced myself if it's going to stick, but it's got me thinking a lot about how I treat my body.

Growing up the youngest of three boys, I played a lot of sports and I genuinely enjoyed them. I swam, played basketball, plus one ill-fated season of baseball, and really loved tennis. One summer, I even signed up for Taekwondo, but I kid you not, we watched Mortal Kombat on the first day and I knew to bow out gracefully.

The issues with my sexuality began to creep in around puberty – no surprise there! Looking back, though, the physical effects on me were pretty rough. My posture, which I used to pride myself on, went to shit; I began to collapse my chest and round my shoulders. I put on weight and became what one gently calls 'husky'. I basically manifested outwardly what I was feeling inside. That I was unlovable.

Then, at university, I embraced being a hipster, mostly because it was a gradual way to come out. Sexuality was certainly more fluid at hipster clubs than a normal straight bar, but it wasn't an actual full-on gay club. So it was perfect for me. Hipsters were generally 15 pounds underweight and I swiftly followed suit, on a strict 'one big salad a day' diet. My goal was simply to remain below a certain number on the scale regardless of the tactics employed. Honestly, it was an eating disorder.

Drama school cleaned me up a bit; my posture was a main topic of conversation with many teachers, but we focused on identifying why I slumped as opposed to simply 'correcting' it. Essentially, drama school was where I finally admitted that I was punishing my body for things beyond my control. Really small adjustments, like my balance improving, had a profound impact on my life. Those three years afforded me a lot of time to explore who I was – too much if you ask some people – and learning to accept my body was a big part of that.

I had to be careful, though. I had to make sure that the 'improvements' were being done for myself and for no one else. I've had many issues with the proliferation of gay men on Instagram, whose sole purpose seems to be posting gym selfies for glorification and adoration. [Editor's note: right before going to press, the author posted a gym selfie.] I'm convinced that most gay men express their sexuality-based shame through their physical health; I'm not alone here, nor should I judge.

Freud would tell me that I criticise those Instagram gays because I see something in them I don't like about myself

Freud would tell me that I criticise those Instagram gays because I see something in them I don't like about myself. And you know what? He's absolutely fucking right. I hate that I don't have the balls to walk bravely around a gym and feel like I belong. Half of my sweating in the gym comes from the pure anxiety at being around men who've never been mistaken for a woman in their lives and actually know how to use the equipment. I get angry with them, but it's displacement, because really, I'm angry with myself for not sucking it up and getting on with it.

I shouldn't care, I know. I shouldn't be sucked into the ever-present obsession with 'masculinity' in the gay community, but going to the gym has had positive benefits as well.

Mostly, I feel stronger and happier after I go, and those two things are so important to me. Physical strength is something I've not allowed myself to feel for most of my life, but now I walk down the street like I belong; not cocky or snobbishly, but I'm also not telling the world within seconds that I don't value myself with a slumped over body.

The happiness is obviously important, because everyone wants to be happy, but the gym literally gets the serotonin flowing through my body and, as a result, my heart and soul are lifted. It's pretty remarkable, and for someone who struggles with anxiety and depression, I'm finding it to be a true gift.

Lesson of the day, kids – don't knock it till you've tried it. ■

@peejaybrennan

CROSS FIT!

WORDS CHRIS JONES **IMAGE** SNOOTYFOX IMAGES
SINGLET BANG + STRIKE

need advice?

Whether you're wanting to look good on the beach, shed a few pounds or just live a healthier lifestyle, email me on fitness@gaytimes.co.uk or tweet me at @chrisjonesgeek. I can't respond to everyone and your emails or tweets may be edited for use in the magazine. We won't publish any contact details.

I'll hold up my hands now and say that I haven't tried CrossFit. What's all the fuss? It sounds like something that'd suit The Hulk. Angry fitness. Get 'cross while you workout'. I've been wondering, so've decided to delve into the CrossFitters' world and explore the key benefits from, what looks like, exercise-boot-camp-ish-hell.

CrossFit is a 'cross' of different and varied exercise techniques that you carry out in sessions ran by an instructor. It's a mix of body weight training, Olympic weight training and aerobic cardio exercises. The main goal? To improve your overall fitness! The results? Becoming a ripped yet buff mo'fo, of course. Regulars who attend these sessions or post about them online have the bodies of an Adonis. One WWE wrestler by the name of Seth Rollins swears by it, and I can happily say that he's a 'gymspiration' for sure.

Classes and sessions are referred to as 'boxes', which are composed of a warm-up, a skilled development section, the 'WOD' known as the 'workout of the day', often followed by stretching. The WOD is dictated by the instructor, but you can also get apps to generate a CrossFit WOD – if you wish to do a bit of CrossFit at home in or in the park.

Equipment wise, some people say that it's a body-weight-only type of regime. Perhaps it can be, but for the best results try and locate dumbbells, pull-up bars, medicine balls, boxes, a rowing machine and skipping ropes.

I've researched a few reasons why CrossFit, might be worth considering:

It's not the norm. People who attend boxes told me that CrossFit is in no way boring at all. It's a great way to add more fun into your workout regime.

It's a great way to meet people. You're all in it 'together' right? And working your body to the max, sweating profusely and making awkward faces surely breaks the ice. I'll leave that comment there…

It's high intensity. That means you pretty much get fitter a lot faster, and you'll notice the results in no time.

A lot of CrossFitters have commented that they love what it's done to their body. A drop in body fat and gain in muscle. Either becoming thinner, or buffer, your results can be tailored to your goals.

I definitely want to sign up. There's a CrossFit-only gym in most big towns and major cities now. Let's all join, go intense and see what the results will bring! ■

Carb Killa
Protein is essential in aiding the body to build and repair muscle tissue, so that you can bring in the benefits of exercise and reload depleted energy levels. Packed with 23g of protein and containing only 214 calories, Carb Killa is a triple-layered tasty treat, which features a generous helping of caramel laid over a soft, chewy base filled with crunchy milk chocolate crispies – all with less than 1.5 grams of sugar and impact carbohydrates. Plus, it's very tasty! ■

[ask chris]

Question I'm 18 years old and since leaving school, 12 years of gymnastics to virtually nothing has left me a bit sluggish. I was toned, but my body has no definition anymore. I blame this on my eating habits. I'm one of the fussiest eaters ever. It's hard for me to eat healthy but I need to change this. My question is – what foods would you recommend for a fussy eater to have a healthy lifestyle and maintain a good diet? Adam, via email

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Answer This is a tough question. You see, if you're a fussy eater, I can't go suggesting a bunch of things that you may not like. If you're feeling sluggish, then I'd suggest 'good carbs' such as wholewheat rice and pasta. Perhaps book in a session with a dietitian to talk your goals through more. ■

Chris' move of the month

lunges

Last month we worked our ASSES. And we're going to carry on getting iron glutes. Lunges work your legs, as well as your butt. They'll blast your quads and are one of the most concentrated leg exercises out there

[01] Stand up straight, with dumbbells in both hands. Take a step backwards on your left leg and keeping your right leg in front of you. Then, lower your body and keep your balance until you can feel the stretch on your leg muscles. Hold the position, then raise yourself back to the starting position.

---

[02] Then repeat on the other leg.

Same-sex couples can now be legally married in the UK. But that means they can also get divorced... What does it mean for newly wed – or unmarried – couples who decide to buy property together? And where do they stand if it all goes up a creek without the proverbial paddle?

[01] Everybody has a past, and not just a dodgy photo or two. Beware of your partner's credit history when applying for a mortgage in the first place. It's not just a myth that their bad credit can affect yours. If your heart's set on that suburban semi, it could hinder proceedings if they fail the bank's checks, and you'll be back to square one. Also, applying for too many things at once is not a good look in lenders' eyes. Both agree to be open and honest about any debt and decide from there if you or they would rather run the mortgage gauntlet alone.

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[02] We want pre-nup... Or do we? In the UK, a pre-nuptial agreement is not legally binding like in the US, which means dividing assets is up to yourselves or the courts. However, a Living Together Agreement – also known as a Cohabitation Agreement – will declare intentions, especially if written as a deed by a solicitor. It's certainly not the most romantic of activities, but will pay off should cuddles on the sofa turn to a fight about who paid the gas bill most often.

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[03] You need to work out who'll be putting what where. No, not like that – we mean the distribution of wealth. It's good to be clear how much of each salary is going into the joint property pot. It's also interesting to see where tenners here and there add up to dramatic change for both partner's input in the long run. Money Advice Service's divorce and separation calculator will give you the bare figures so you can set down beforehand what the deal would be.

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[04] The next step depends on who owns the place. As a married couple, you both have entitlement to stay in a joint home. But if your partner is the sole owner, it's wise to register your rights with the land registry. This'll take you from tenants in common, meaning everything is split down the middle between two, to joint tenants, whereby it's all shared. Some couples prefer to stay as tenants in common at the start of a relationship, but if you've been together for years or have children, joining up covers you if your other half dies.

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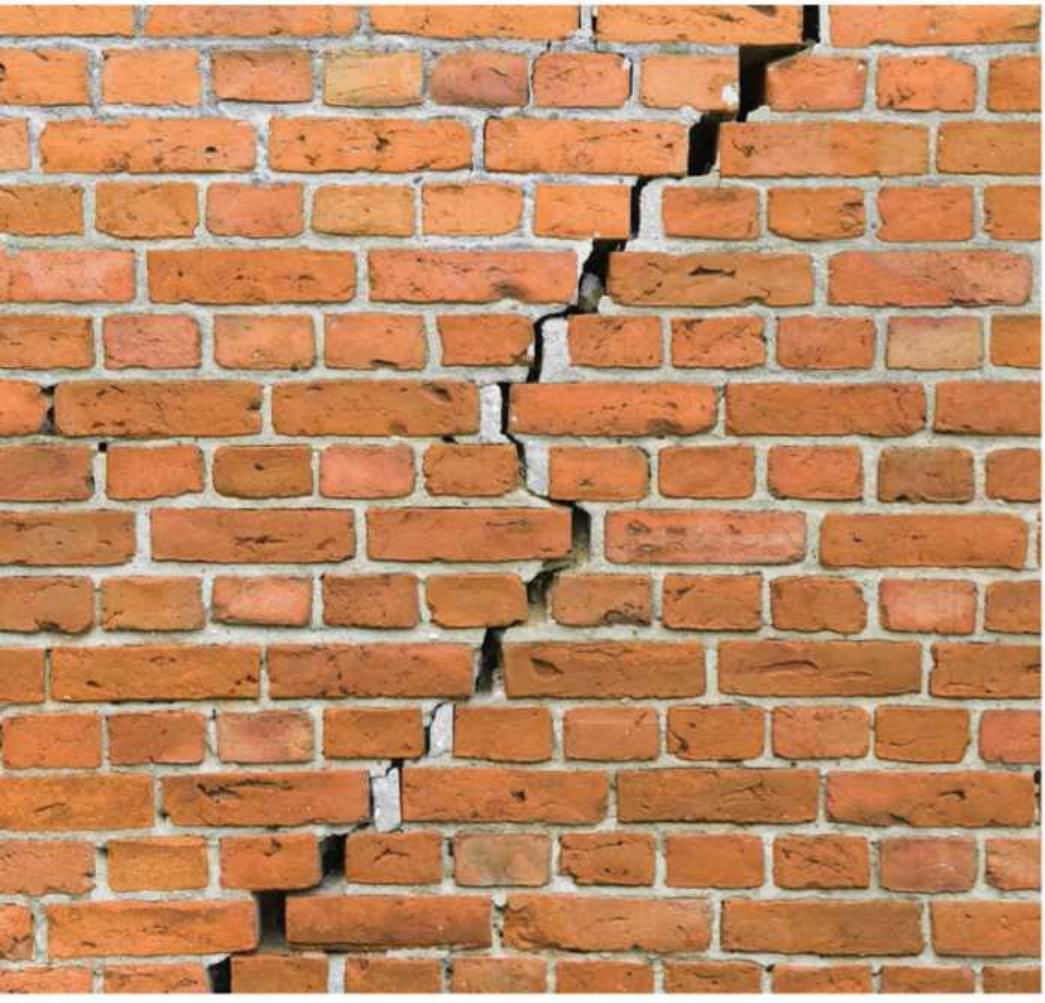
[05] According to the Citizen's Advice Bureau, one of their most popular questions regarding the matter is: "Can I change the locks?" The answer is a sketchy one. If you're both on the deeds then no, as you both have warrant to be there. But if one of you isn't, then all it takes is an adequate notice period, a locksmith and probably a pretty big argument afterwards. It's certainly not the most cheery of subjects, that's for sure. But once you've got the depressing legal chat over, you're free for a life of wedded bliss and no grey areas about money. Then all that matters is who's carrying who over the threshold. ■

WORDS JESSICA LINDSAY



THIS LOVELY HOUSE [2 lovely gays]

IMAGE MEGAN TAYLOR / TARAN WILKHU

Something a little more personal for you this month.

Like Tom Hanks and Shelley Long in 80s classic The Money Pit, we moved into our new wreck of a home earlier this year. Leaky roof, no heating or electrics. Draughty old windows. A hose over the bath.

Romantic is what we're calling it – and luckily we're still smiling. Paint stripper is our friend and we've become very used to stubbing our toes on loose nails in the floor boards.

We wanted to share this early stage in the project with you as it's something we'll be working on for many months, keeping you updated on the progress. Right now it's a bit of a ghost house and we still feel like we're glamping. A tentative rummage in the loft revealed a box with the previous owner's old wedding dress in it. From 1959! We're half expecting to wake up in the middle of the night with the dress standing at the foot of our bed.

With other people's homes to work on, time to do ours up is limited, so no holidays for us any time soon. But that's OK, because we're home bodies and can't wait to make a massive impact on this place so we can show you what we've done.

Makeovers only happen on telly and, when it comes to real design, there are no quick fixes. Having sorted the leaky roof and had the place plumbed and rewired, all the non-fun stuff, it's uphill from here on in.

As projects go, it's a beast. And as we're sure any of you into interiors will know, once you strip it back, it can be more scary than ever because you really see the size of it.

For now, we're focussing our attention and what little funds we have, on... Our downstairs toilet. Often forgotten, but not in this case, it's going to be a tiny hidden gem for any guest. We're working on a bespoke wallpaper design based on the old print we found under the wood chip and giving it a modern graphic twist.

All will be revealed soon. Hopefully. Wish us luck. ■

Turn your back on machine-made precision and evoke a simpler time. Natural texture, honest construction and imperfect lines. Finish with a touch of copper – one of man's oldest worked metals – to add a glint of rustic glamour

THE SIMPLE LIFE

WORDS MARK KING

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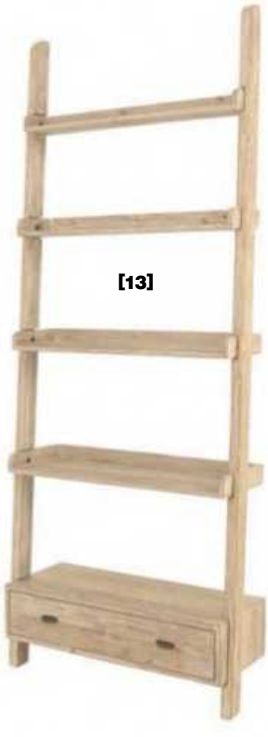
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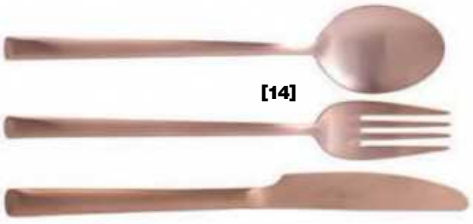

[14]

01
The guest brushes
Sustainable bamboo toothbrushes. Bamboo Toothbrushes, £13.50 for four, pinksumo.com

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02
The distressed shade
Lampshade wrapped in fibreglass strips. Pendelleuchte Ariadne Shade, €299, lumineur.com

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03
The log basket
Sisal storage for your fireside. Wood Basket, £35, idyllhome.co.uk

---

04
The dog basket
Classic comfort for your four-legged chum. Charley Chau Oval Rattan Dog Basket, from £50, charleychau.com

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05
The desk
Elegant cabinet-making in warm mango wood. Ginsberg desk, £269, swooneditions.com

---

06
The copper clock
Cool minimalism to sharpen the look. Karisson Copper White Wall Clock, £55,rigbyandmac.com

---

07
The woven table
Organic, handcrafted ratan. Washed Rattan Square Coffee Table, £396, theorchardhomeand-gifts.com

---

08
The night light
A Wee Willie Winkie classic. Copper Candle Stick by House Doctor, £32, atnumber67.co.uk

---

09
The rustic bowls
Crafted from mango wood. Indus Wooden Bowl, £29.95, nkuku.com

---

10
The reading chair
Curl up and read a classic in the conservatory. Shelby Rattan Egg Chair, £455, outthereinteriors.com

---

11
The Scandi chair
Cosy and comfortable simplicity. Karla armchair, £429, swooneditions.com

---

12
The textured rug
Texture and pattern in pure wool. Trumps Rug, £195, loaf.com

13
The leaning shelves
Artisan ladder shelving in beached timber. Tiger shelves, £245, loaf.com

---

14
The copper silverware
Classic with a twist for your table. Brushed copper 24-piece cutlery set, £180, houseoffraser.co.uk

---

Mismatched tableware has its own particular charm. It can add a welcoming informality to a get-together, or a homely intimacy when you're curled up on the sofa. It can also do a little good for the developing world. Well, this range of homewares from Dassie can. These artisan pieces are Fairtrade, handcrafted in South Africa from natural and recycled materials. Ethical, individual and perfectly-imperfect style with a conscience. ■

Dassie tableware, from £14.95, dassie.co.uk

Ore-oh yeah!

EDD KIMBER IS THE BOY WHO BAKES

It's true these may look a little like Oreos that've been filled with green play dough rather than the usual sugary sweet filling. But actually, it's a delicious matcha white chocolate ganache. Matcha is finely ground green tea, and it's said to be a superfood, packed full with antioxidants and can even supposedly aid weight loss. As it's such a healthy product, I've added it to white chocolate and cream – for balance! This recipe makes a lot, but you can easily freeze half of the dough and bake at a later date...

Oreo Cookies

Makes 20-25

Cookies

275g plain flour
40g cocoa powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp fine sea salt
200g unsalted butter
125g caster sugar
125g light brown sugar

Matcha White Chocolate Ganache

300g white chocolate
200ml double cream
3 tsp matcha powder

To make the cookies, place the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt into a bowl, and mix together to combine. Add the butter and sugars into a large bowl and use an electric mixer to beat together for a couple of minutes until everything is combined. Add the flour mixture and, on low speed, mix until the flour has just been incorporated into the butter, stopping when the dough is still very crumbly, but only once you can no longer see any flour. Tip the crumbly dough out on the work surface and carefully bring together into a dough. Divide into two equal pieces and lightly form into logs, about 5cm thick. Wrap the dough in cling film and refrigerate for a few hours until firm.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) and line two baking trays with parchment paper.

While the dough is chilling, make the ganache. Place the chocolate into a large bowl and set aside. Add the cream and matcha to a saucepan and bring to a simmer, stirring vigorously to dissolve the tea. Once the cream is at temperature, pour over the chocolate and leave alone for a couple of minutes before stirring together to form a vibrant green ganache. Press a sheet of cling film onto the surface of the ganache and refrigerate for an hour or so until the cookies are baked and cooled.

Use a thin sharp knife to carefully slice the dough into rounds about 3mm thick, placing onto the prepared baking trays. Bake in the preheated oven for about 10-11 minutes. They'll feel a little soft in the middle, but that's fine. Once cooled, place the ganache into a piping bag, fitted with a small round piping tip, and use to sandwich the cookies together.

Kept in a sealed container, these will keep for up to three days. ■

Author of The Boy Who Bakes, Say It With Cake and Patisserie Made Simple, @theboywhobakes

Good Fortuna

If there's one thing the Italians do better than anyone else, it's wine. And the Fortuna Vini range is no exception. The Vini Gold is the perfect marriage between the scent of white roses and delicate Italian fruits, while Vini Scent of Angel is one of the finest examples of Italian rosé this side of Valdobbiadene. More adventurous palettes might prefer the Vini Peach and Passion – with its unique bouquet of peach flowers, golden apple and citrus fruit, it's a perfect apéritif which won't break the bank. Salute! Available at drinks21.com, priced £12.99-£16.99. ■

Autumnal Stuffed Mushrooms (v)
Serves two
8 large mushrooms
25g breadcrumbs (try to use fresh, not dried)
1 clove of garlic
50g Pecorino
A big handful of fresh, flat-leaf parsley (4 tbsp chopped)
25g hazelnuts (roasted and finely chopped)
Black pepper, sweet paprika, olive oil, 1 lemon zest and juice

---

One of us was a vegetarian for about three years – while the other smugly scoffed steak and roast chicken to their heart's content. One of the worst things about vegetarian dishes – both at dinner parties and in restaurants – is that more often than not, they're either covered in cheese, smothered in heavy creamy sauce or really lacking the punchy, belly-filling flavour that meat dishes provide.

Both earthy-flavoured and filling, mushrooms are the real exception and are a fantastic meat alternative. Stuffed mushrooms, whether served as a starter or bulking out a main dish, are the perfect vegetarian dish that won't leave you feeling hungry or missing out. With mushrooms available year-round, this recipe is great for a hearty lunch for one, an indulgent dinner for two, while also impressive enough for entertaining friends – with really minimal effort required.

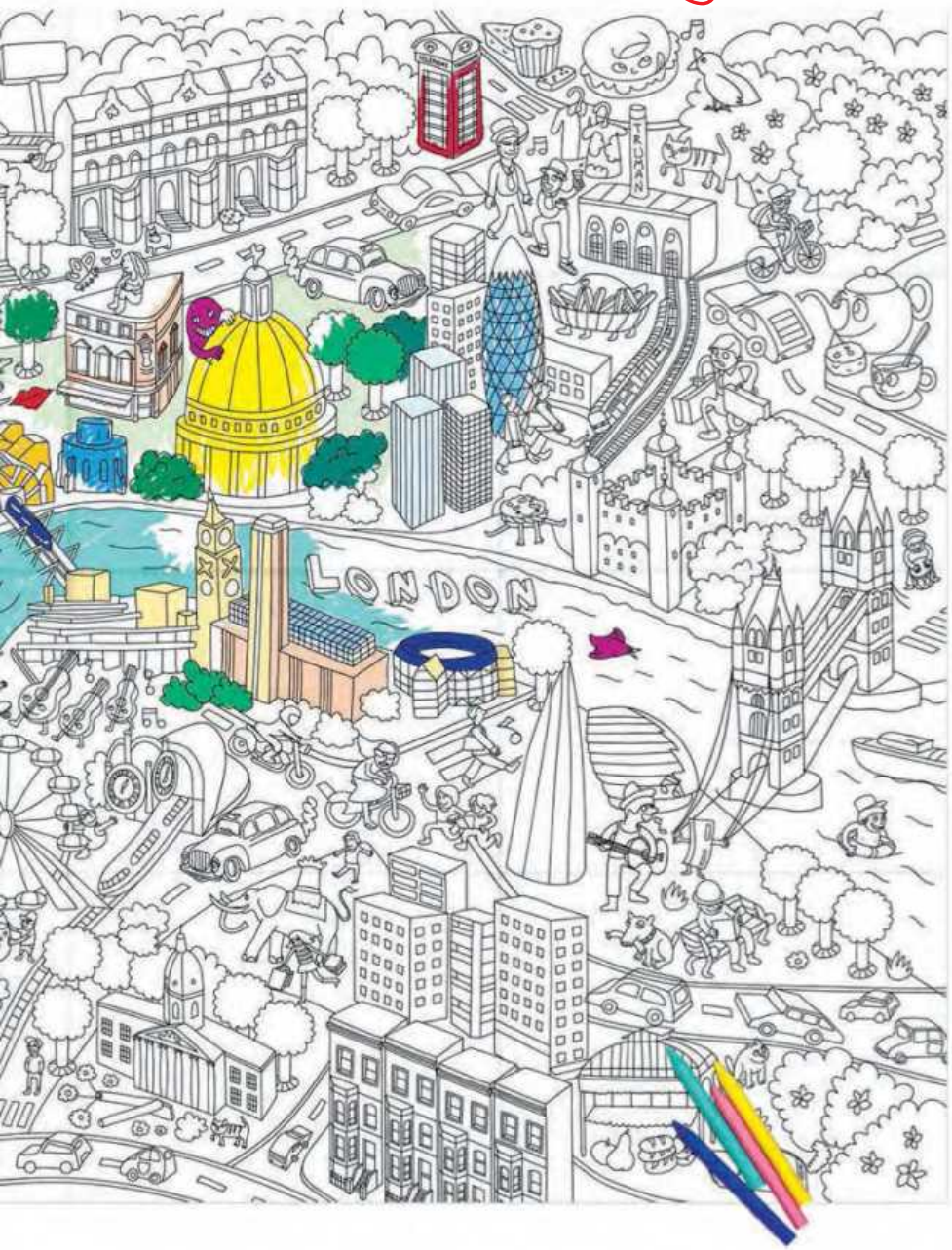
Portobello mushrooms are great for this, as they're huge and can take lots of filling, while smaller mushrooms work nicely as finger food or mini bites to start a meal. Mushrooms will always shrink in the process; do take this into account. We've kept this recipe simple and straightforward, but use it as a base to jump from to test your skills, grow your palette and let your kitchen creativity take over. Feel free to swap out the salty Pecorino for fruity and creamy parmesan instead. And to make this vegetarian, many major supermarkets now stock vegetarian hard cheeses.

Scrub any dirt off the mushrooms – never wash, mushrooms are like sponges and will absorb it all – and pluck out the stems, which you can finely chop and add to the filling mixture if you like, or reserve for using in other dishes and in stock. Place the mushrooms cap side-up on a lined baking tray and brush the edges with a little rapeseed or olive oil.

Next, make the filling by finely chopping the parsley and garlic as you lightly toast the hazelnuts. Grate the lemon zest and cheese – setting aside a quarter of the cheese for later – and combine everything together with a little oil, lemon juice and seasoning of pepper and paprika.

Lob the mixture inside the upturned caps and top with a sprinkling of grated cheese on each before baking for 12-15 minutes in a 200°C oven. These'll be molten when first taken out, so best leave them to cool slightly before eating. They always taste fabulous with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar. ■

Gastro Gays are Patrick Hanlon and Russell Alford. For more visit gastrogays.com, @gastrogays



Between the lines It's no secret – actually, it's a scientific fact – that colouring in can bring calming and positive vibes to your daily routine. So with National Stress Awareness Day approaching in November, French design studio OMY Design and Play have created a great way for your kids to relax – a large and intricate map of London, just waiting to be brought to life by your little one's imagination. There are fun characters and larger than life objects your child can immerse themselves in. And hey, there's even a range for grown-ups too, meaning you can pick up the Crayolas and start scribbling the stress away yourself. ■ Available from £9.90, stonegift.com

TIPS TO CREATE THE PERFECT WEDDING MENU

With food intertwined with some of the happiest moments in our lives, getting the perfect mix of substance and taste is tough. We spoke to Nicole Richardson, co-founder of bespoke event caterers Hunter VIII Hunter, on how you can add personality and style to your wedding soiree.

[01] Something a little different
Think about how you want your menu to be experienced. Do you want a relaxed affair where there are themed food stations and people can help themselves? Or is a sit down five course menu more your style? They're so many options out there, so don't limit yourself to the traditional. For example, if you're getting married on a boat, why not try a sea food theme for your menu?

[02] Sensational seasons
Implement your colour scheme and the season into your wedding menu. Coordinating colours doesn't have to end at the flowers and chair covers, as there are beautiful edible flowers and micro-herbs that can take a dish to a whole new level. Work with your caterer to source fresh seasonal ingredients from local producers, and remember it's the little touches that really bring everything together in the end.

[03] Only work with the best
Work with a company that truly understands you and has staff that won't be surprised or behave inappropriately during the day. It's your big day and you should feel comfortable with all of the team right down to the waiting staff, who'll be a big part of the wedding.

[04] Conforming is overrated
Never feel like you need to conform to other people's views of how something should be. We haven't so far, so why should we now? A wedding menu should be personal to you and, as such, should be created on a bespoke basis to reflect your personalities and your journey as a couple. Why not include your favourite dishes or something you ate together on your first date? It's a wonderful way of sharing your love story with your guests. ■

We spoke to Nicole from Hunter VIII Hunter, a luxury, bespoke and independent event caterer, @_hunter8hunter, hunter8hunter.london

WORDS RHYS MATHEWS / DARRYL WHITE / ELLEN JOHNSON

DANIEL AND DALE DEFINITIVE COMMITMENT

From the moment I met Dale, I knew he was the one. That sounds like the ultimate cliché, but that's exactly how it felt. I'd never been so sure of anything in my life. It was all the more profound for me as I'd been so unlucky in love in the past. When you meet 'the one', all you want to do is spend the rest of your life with them. Dale and I have been happily married for a few months now and I can't imagine my life without him.

Marriage for us was the definitive commitment to one another. We were so excited to share our love with our family and friends, and our wedding day was without a doubt the best day of our lives. We look back on it with such happy memories. We quickly realised there'd probably be no other occasion where we'd be fortunate enough to spend an entire day surrounded by all the people we love.

One of the many wonderful blessings of getting married is that it allows you to express why you love the person you love. All the feelings you have for that person are brought to the surface and are heightened. Put simply, it reminds you and reiterates to you just how lucky you are to be able to share your life with this person. The high we experienced that day was far better than any drug and our bond has never been stronger.

Marriage to us has been everything it promised to be: It's brought us closer as a couple; it's connected two families whom we love; it's allowed our love to be recognised by law.

And, most importantly, it's provided the opportunity for us to say publicly and with tremendous pride, 'This is who I love; this is who I choose.' ■

So fetch Channel your inner Gretchen Wieners and really make fetch happen with The Sticks family. You can choose from Twiggy and Woody – two fun dog toys that are eco-friendly, float in water and even glow in the dark. Ideal for chucking and chasing. It'll keep you out of your dog's burn book, at least. ■ Priced £11.50 each, dooguk.com

Marshmallow innovators Boomf are back with more tasty treats – and this time, especially for us gays. Or bis. Or trans. Or whichever facet of the LGBT+ spectrum you subscribe. Their latest range is the Coming Out marshmallows, inspired by the original ways people have, well, come out. Perfect if you're looking for a unique same-sex wedding favour – the only thing sweeter would be the vows. You can also have them personalised with any image you might want, creating a gift for any special occasion. A box of nine will set you back £15, including free postage anywhere in the world, boomf.com. ■

VANCOUVER

BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA

WORDS RYAN BUTCHER

There's a song by twee indie folksters The Elected with the lyrics, "British Columbia's real nice this time of year". It's a lyric that's going round and round our heads as our plane starts to descend over the proud Canadian mountains and into Vancouver airport. But after our five days in the Canadian province, we're aghast at how much The Elected have been underselling BC to us all these years. It's not just "real nice" – it's jaw droppingly beautiful.

A sizeable chunk of British Columbia, as you might expect from Canada, is wilderness; with thick woodland and jagged peaks stretching as far as the eye can see. But nestled somewhere between the sprawling mountain ranges and surrounding sea is the city of Vancouver.

More than half of the population of British Columbia live in the Vancouver region, with Vancouver city known as being one of the densest, friendliest and most ethnically-diverse cities in Canada. And whether it's the allure of the outdoor pursuits in the surrounding wildlife right on the city's doorstep, the booming arts and culture scene, the varied nightlife or even the charming gay village, it should be no surprise to learn that Vancouver consistently appears within the top five most-liveable cities on the planet.

Our stay was spent at the Opus Hotel (opushotel.com) – a uniquely stylish boutique hotel pretty much situated in the heart of the city. Despite being neighboured by bars, restaurants, coffee shops and towering skyscrapers, the Opus' colourful and contemporary rooms become your home away from home, with sleek spa-style bathrooms and heated floors to boot.

It's kitted out with its own cocktail bar, fitness centre and Italian restaurant. Oh, and they welcome

VANCOUVER CANADA
POPULATION 603,502
SIZE 44.39 SQUARE MILES
TIME ZONE PDT (UTC–7)
GAY LEGAL

you with a glass of fizz on arrival. With all the amenities and quality of a luxury chain, but the charm and style of something independently owned, it's no wonder it's the city's only Forbes four star boutique hotel.

It's no more than a five minute walk from the Opus to the stunning water's edge of Vancouver. Quaint little water taxis ferry tourists and locals alike to-and-from the mainland to the famous Granville Island. Made up of rich and vibrant markets, independently-owned stores, bars and bistros serving the finest in locally-sourced Canadian produce – we recommend the duck poutine at Edible Canada (ediblecana.com) – and even a whiskey distillery, it's like a friendlier version of London's Shoreditch before the hipsters took it over and started spray-painting the walls and vomiting in the streets.

One of the most exhilarating ways to see Vancouver, though, is on the Sea Vancouver zodiac tour (seavancouver.com). Taking around 90 minutes and departing from the Westin Bayshore Hotel, the high-speed zodiac whisks you across the placid waters of Vancouver's inner harbour, before knocking it up to 55km-per-hour to cross the Burrard Inlet. When you first arrive to the city, it's one of the best ways to get to grips with its rich history, thanks to trained and knowledgable skippers, while marvelling at the splendour of both its architecture and its green spaces, including the Coal Harbour, North Shore, English Bay, False Creek and Stanley Park.

Vancouver also boasts some of the finest restaurants and bars we've had the pleasure of visiting. The Hawksworth Restaurant (hawsworthrestaurant.com) embraces contemporary Canadian cuisine in an elegant and glamorous setting, and is led by one of the most respected and established chefs in all of Canada, David Hawksworth. And meat lovers will want to check out Black+Blue steakhouse (blackandblue.ca) – especially the rooftop patio, where a contemporary menu of exotic meat cuts is complimented by classic cocktails. Although let's just say we reckon the Brussels sprouts are a bit more of an acquired taste...

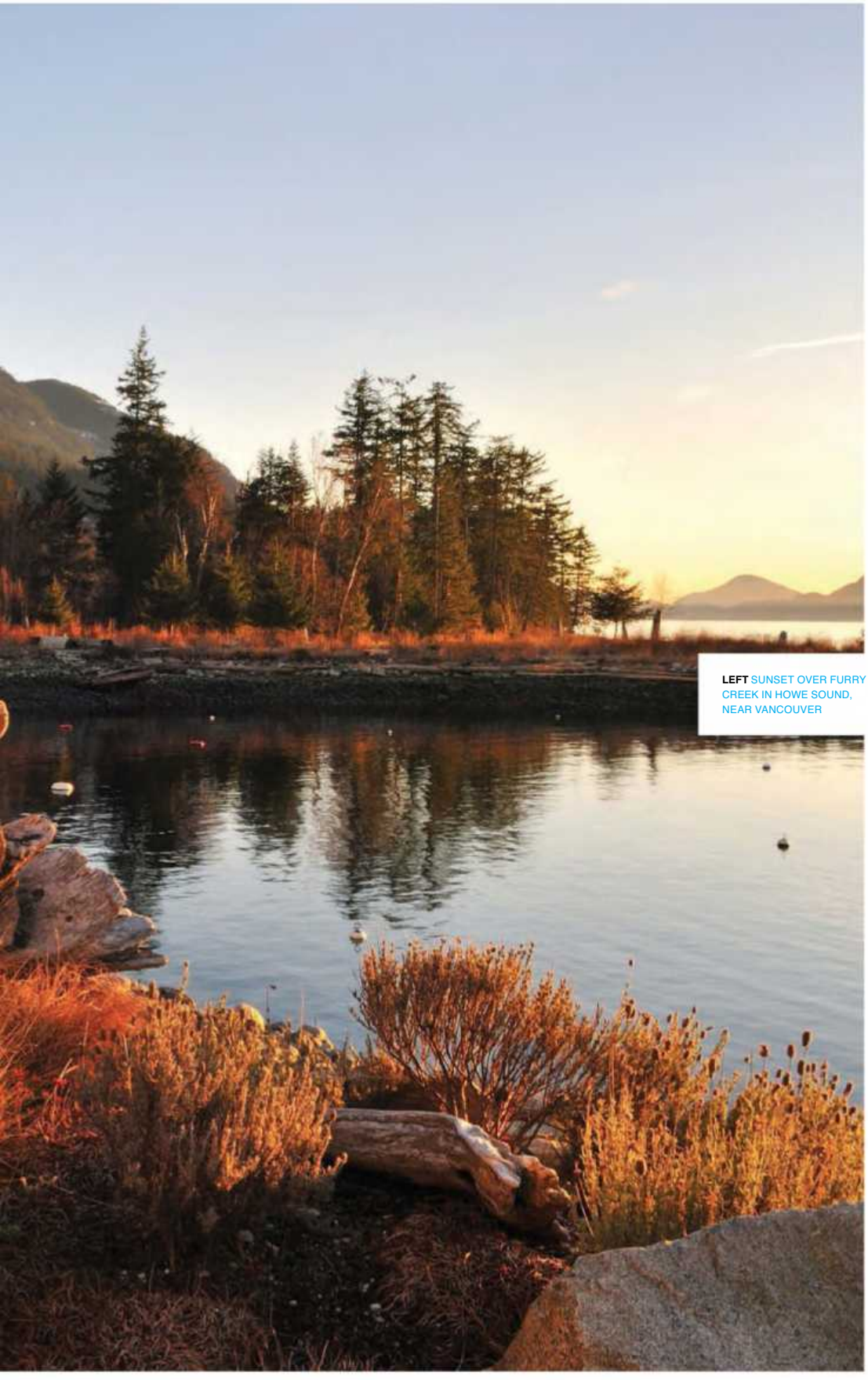
Just a couple of short hours will make you want to sack off your real life, build a cabin in the woods and live out your days

The city's oldest neighbourhood, Gastown, is paved with cobbled streets bursting with stylish nightspots to suit all tastes, while a short trip on a SkyTrain will take you to Commercial Drive – a bohemian, beatnik neighbourhood of vintage shops and hip bars. Basically, the kind of place our mum would call "studenty".

Oh, and yes, there's a gay village, too. The largest gay population in Western Canada lives in Vancouver city, and unsurprisingly, the whole city is incredibly gay-friendly. But there's also a designated gay neighbourhood, with Rainbow Flag cross-walks in the roads, gay-owned restaurants and bakeries, and all manners of bars – from sports to leather – ensuring you'll never be lost for something to do. It's far from a ghettoised community, though. All across the city, LGBT couples of all ages are holding hands and living their lives perfectly comfortably.

We've mentioned the stunning wilderness of Vancouver – and it's a big tourist pull for outdoor hobbyists and adventurers of all skill levels. Hikers from around the world travel to trek through the mountains, while the waters are filled with wind surfers and canoeists, all thanks to the region's Sea to Sky Country. Starting in the picturesque Horeshoe Bay, just 30 minutes away from downtown Vancouver, it stretches all the way to the Lillooet. The water of the Howe Sound glitters turquoise, while jagged, snow-capped peaks reach up to frame the sky. No matter what direction you're looking in, the views are simply unforgettable. Breathtaking, really. The kind of stuff postcards are made of. Whether you're at the majestic Shannon Falls, or the Porteau Cove, the stresses of modern city living are simply swept away by the cool mountain air.

Last summer saw the completion of the Sea to Sky Gondola (seatoskygondola.com) – an adventure in itself, as a scenic gondola ride takes you some 880-and-odd metres above sea level with sweeping views of the surrounding sub-alpine meadows of the Squamish area, and the coastal forests around the Howe Sound. Once at the top, there's hiking trails, rock climbing and access to the backcountry. Just a couple of short hours up there will make you want to sack in your real life, build a log cabin in the woods and live out your days whittling wood, wearing checked shirts and making friends with bears. Let's just say that if you were ever going to buy a selfie stick, this would be where you'd want to use it.



LEFT SUNSET OVER FURRY CREEK IN HOWE SOUND, NEAR VANCOUVER

If the sights up high weren't enough, the sights on the water are just as breathtaking – for different reasons. The Prince of Whales Vancouver tour (princeofwhales.com) is a four hour adventure crossing the protected waters of Haro Strait and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in search of the wildlife that inhabits the local waters. Departing again from the Westin Bayshore Hotel, this is the largest whale watching and eco-adventure tour company that British Columbia has to offer. It's never guaranteed that you're going to see something like a hunchback whale, of course, but if you do, it'll be a sight you'll never forget.

This is also a chance to travel to Victoria – the capital of British Columbia, known as Canada's own "little slice of England" and home of the world-famous Butchart Gardens... But we'll have to save that part of the adventure for another time.

It's a little over a nine hour flight, which can be a piece of cake for some and an absolute marathon for others, but with Air Canada's new premium economy service – much more leg room, comfier seats, the same meals they serve in business class, and access to priority services at the airport – the trip is a breeze for even the most anxious of fliers, for just a bit of extra cash.

So whether you're looking for the comfort and culture of a city break, or the rough and tumble of an outdoor adventure – without sounding like a massive cliché – British Columbia has got it all. And take it from us, rather than The Elected – it's so, so much more than "real nice", whatever the time of year. ■

GT travelled with Air Canada, which operates its new 777-300ER aircraft on flights from London Heathrow to Vancouver, featuring a new premium economy option. Return economy/premium economy flights start from £619.96/£1224.96, including taxes. For more, visit aircanada.com or call 0871 220 1111. To find out more about British Columbia, visit hellobc.com, @aircanada, @hellobc

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A STAR FILLED COUNTRY BREAK

WORDS BY NICKY OSBORNE

Make tracks to the countryside from bustling Brighton or London after a hectic week at work, and be charmed by The Star at Alfriston, a timeless village at the foot of the South Downs. With Brighton only half an hour away, and direct frequent train services from nearby Berwick Station to Brighton or London, The Star is the perfect weekend getaway.

From the moment you enter the heavily beamed bar you are travelling back in time. This Grade Two listed inn was originally built to accommodate pilgrims on their travels between Battle and Chichester, and is loaded with character.

The Star Inn combines history and modernity successfully. The main bars have brick and wooden floors, chunky wooden tables and chairs, and not one but three beautiful fireplaces which are roaring in the winter months. Subtle lighting enhances the glow of the fire and creates a perfect ambience, and you can lose yourself for hours as you sample the excellent menu and wine list. A simple, airy yet elegant restaurant is available if you wish for more formal dining to perhaps celebrate an anniversary or birthday, and The Sanctuary offers a quiet cosy room for reading the papers or sampling an after dinner tipple.

All 37 bedrooms have been completely refurbished and are funky and contemporary. Warm sensuous colours create a cosy cocoon, all with stylish modern bathrooms. The feature bedrooms are a must see; two of which are located in the oldest part of the building and transport you back in time.'The Smugglers' Lair' bedroom has a handmade 'stock' bed, which whispers indulgence and romance! For the ultimate declaration of love The Star has it all; a bespoke personal service, a variety of packages to suit all tastes and budgets, and a choice of stunning rooms and areas to make your wedding day extra special.

Alfriston itself is a paradise for walkers and cyclists, with the South Downs Way running through the village. Quaint tea shops, an award winning bookshop and elegant boutiques provide interesting retail opportunities.

So, what are you waiting for? Surprise your loved one, grab your overnight bag, and escape to the country. As a tonic for all the rush and stress of modern life and living, treat yourself to this country retreat nestled in the Cuckmere Valley and don't delay.

We will be at Preston Park for Pride Weekend in Brighton, please drop by and have a chat with us!

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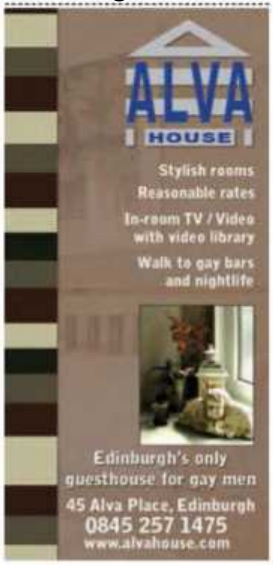

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GT A TO Z

To advertise in this section contact **Jo Vasconcelos** Tel **020 7424 7451** E-mail **jo@gaytimes.co.uk**
Deadline for next issue **8 September**

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1. In the UK these arrangements cannot be done for any commercial purpose and the intended parents should only pay reasonable expenses. This applies even if you are having the baby overseas.
2. If you fail to issue your Parental Order Application within 6 months of the child's birth then you will risk the ability to both become legal parents will full rights.
3. The surrogate and, if married, her husband/wife must sign a court form and the child must be living with the intended parents at the time of the application.

Why not just go abroad where its legally binding and I can pay for the surrogate?

1. Many couples do go abroad, for example, to the USA in order to enter into legally binding surrogacy agreements. However, even when they have obtained legal parent status abroad they still need to apply to the courts to grant recognition in the UK.
2. If no application is made in the UK, the surrogate remains the legal mother and the intended parent will have limited rights should their spouse die, become incapacitated or upon divorce.
3. The process for removing the surrogate as the birth mother is a Parental Order Application. This is the only way in English law to permanently remove the original birth mother from a birth certificate.

What happens to the baby if something happens to me?

1. A will is very important during this process so that if something happens to the biological father, your unborn/born baby, is protected and your intentions for a guardian clear.
2. If the intended, non-biological parent, is to be the next of kin in the event of your death or incapacity this should be clearly outlined in your will to protect their status as the intended parent.
3. It is also advisable to ensure you have thought about life insurance, mitigating inheritance tax and that your will outlines your wishes so that these can be followed upon your death for your child's and partners protection.

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